SELECTED TEACHINGS AND CONVERSATIONS OF AND
CONTEMPORARY THOUGHTS AND WRITINGS ON

SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA DEVA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA FOR YOU

Edited by

SATYAM ROYCHOWDHURY

'God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true.
The important thing is to reach the roof.'

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA
FOR YOU

An initiative of Techno India Group

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I S B N : 978-93-84561-19-2

Front Cover : Close Up of Sri Ramakrishna idol at Belur Math
Front Flap : Painting by Frank Dvorak
Back Cover : Dakshineswar Temple from the Ganges

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Archival Research : Biplab Ganguli

Cover Design : Subhamay Basu

To Mou, my soulmate

For holding my hand in ever lasting companionship

The time was ripe for one ‘to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite’heart of Chaitanya ; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God ; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for every one in this world, inside India or outside India ; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence. Such a man was born. ...He was a strange man, this Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

—Swami Vivekananda

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Preface

“Avatara varishthaya Ramakrishnaya te namah”

Thakur Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva had delivered a gospel of strength with which human beings can overpower the thousand and one frailties of worldly existence.In his sociology or metaphysics of values Jiva (man) = Siva (God). The formulation of this equation by Sri Ramakrishna enables us to establish an identity between service to man and service to or worship of God. We are again and again rendered conscious that he was not constructing a ‘kingdom that is not of this world’. This is the most marked characteristic in the sayings of Ramakrishna. He was a positivist, a teacher of worldly duties in the most emphatic sense. On the other hand, Ramakrishna’s perpetual emphasis on the spirit and the soul is epochal.He has taught mankind that with this instrument men and women can demolish the discouraging conditions of the surrounding world and transform them in the interest of the expansion of life.The freedom of personality is a concept by which Ramakrishna has succeeded in electrifying all classes of the human society. The diversity of paths in the moral world does not frighten him-it is rather the fundamental ground-work in his analysis of human behaviour. As a true servant of man he is profoundly convinced of the dignity of individual manhood and personality.

His faith in the dignity of man enables him thus to welcome the exponents of every faith as the builders of and travellers on the most diverse roads to reality, light and immortality....

Every wanderer on all these most heterogeneous roads is to him a colleague and fellow-priest in the temple of man’s struggle towards higher and higher flights of freedom.

Sri Ramakrishna’s religion of life does not consider itself to be adequate and complete until it has granted a franchise of self-expression and self-direction to the creative urges, morals and spiritual experiences of the ‘other groups’—new races, strange faces, the minds of the great not-self. Nobody thus has been a more pronounced architect of the republic of religions than Sri Ramakrishna.

The teachings of Thakur, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda have been soul stirring for me ever since I was a child.The very sight of the serenity in Thakur’s and Ma’s faces givesme all the solace I need in my moments of bitter disillusionand the power that exudes from Swamiji’s countenance enables me to take up any work with courage and conviction.

The invaluable treasure-chest of all of Thakur’s teachings through his

utterances and conversations take thousands of pages and innumerable volumes to be cast in print. Through **Sri Ramakrishna For You**, I have merely attempted to present to you a very concise and yet representative compilation of a few gems from his timeless utterances.The recollections of his disciples, contemporaries and admirers have been included to add a very important dimension to this work.I have relied primarily on the reservoir of published works by Advaita Ashrama-the publications division of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, on Thakur and his blessed men and women and have no words suitable enough to pay my gratitude to Revered Swami Tattwavidananda ji, President-Advaita Ashrama for his love and affection and kind permission to refer to and reproduce from its various publications and use its invaluable archive of photographs and documents.I offer my humble pranams to Revd. Maharaj ji and his blessings would always be a source of motivation for me.

I take this opportunity to thank Biplab Ganguli-a dear friend who has been steadfastly by my side throughout this work as always in the past.His depth of archival research,relentless pursuit of excellence and his great passion about the lives of this Holy Trinity has immensely enriched this work.His intellectual comradeship will be a constant source of inspiration in all my enveavours.

Shankar and Diptangshu Mondal of Deep Prakashan deserve a large share of my gratitude for yet again agreeing to undertake the ardous task of publishing this book.

The unflinching support and enthusiasm of all members of my extended family of Techno India Group have been providing me with the much needed strength to pursue such passions every year.

Last,but not the least, I would not even attempt to measure the encouragement and sacrifice of my son Rishi and wife Mou.Rishi and Mou-you have without a frown and in total emotional companionship, accepted my frequent physical absence from your lives while I worked on this publication.

I hope and pray that you enjoy reading the book as much as I did putting it together.

Makara Sankranti **Satyam Roy Chowdhury**
January 14, 2015

A BRIEF LIFE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI NIKHILANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna, the God-man of modern India, was born at Kamarpukur. This village in the Hooghly District preserved during the last century the idyllic simplicity of the rural areas of Bengal. Situated far from the railway, it was untouched by the glamour of the city. It contained rice-fields, tall palms, royal banyans, a few lakes, and two cremation grounds. South of the village a stream took its leisurely course. A mango orchard dedicated by a neighbouring zamindar to the public use was frequented by the boys for their noonday sports. A highway passed through the village to the great temple of Jagannath at Puri, and the villagers, most of whom were farmers and craftsmen, entertained many passing holy men and pilgrims. The dull round of the rural life was broken by lively festivals, the observance of sacred days, religious singing, and other innocent pleasures.

About his parents Sri Ramakrishna once said: “My mother was the personification of rectitude and gentleness. She did not know much about the ways of the world; innocent of the art of concealment, she would say what was in her mind. People loved her for open-heartedness. My father, an orthodox brahmin, never accepted gifts from the Sudras. He spent much of his time in worship and meditation, and in repeating God’s name and chanting His glories. Whenever in his daily prayers he invoked the Goddess Gayatri, his chest flushed and tears rolled down his cheeks. He spent his leisure hours making garlands for the Family Deity, Raghuvir.”

Khudiram Chattopadhyaya and Chandra Devi, the parents of Sri Ramakrishna, were married in 1799. At that time Khudiram was living in his ancestral village of Derepore, not far from Kamarpukur. Their first son, Ramkumar, was born in 1805, and their first daughter, Katyayani, in 1810. In 1814 Khudiram was ordered by his landlord to bear false witness in court against a neighbour. When he refused to do so, the landlord brought a false case against him and deprived him of his ancestral property. Thus dispossessed, he arrived, at the invitation of another landlord, in the quiet village of Kamarpukur, where he was given a dwelling and about an acre of fertile land. The crops from this little property were enough to meet his family’s simple needs. Here he lived in simplicity, dignity, and contentment.

Ten years after his coming to Kamarpukur, Khudiram made a pilgrimage on

foot to Rameswar, at the southern extremity of India. Two years later was born his second son, whom he named Rameswar. Again in 1835, at the age of sixty, he made a pilgrimage, this time to Gaya. Here, from ancient times, Hindus have come from the four corners of India to discharge their duties to their departed ancestors by offering them food and drink at the sacred footprint of the Lord Vishnu. At this holy place Khudiram had a dream in which the Lord Vishnu promised to be born as his son. And Chandra Devi, too, in front of the Shiva temple at Kamarpukur, had a vision indicating the birth of a divine child. Upon his return the husband found that she had conceived.

It was on February 18, 1836, that the child, to be known afterwards as Ramakrishna, was born. In memory of the dream at Gaya he was given the name of Gadadhar, the “Bearer of the Mace”, an epithet of Vishnu. Three years later a little sister was born.

Boyhood

Gadadhar grew up into a healthy and restless boy, full of fun and sweet mischief. He was intelligent and precocious and endowed with a prodigious memory. On his father’s lap he learnt by heart the names of his ancestors and the hymns to the gods and goddesses, and at the village school he was taught to read and write. But his greatest delight was to listen to recitations of stories from Hindu mythology and the epics. These he would afterwards recount from memory, to the great joy of the villagers. Painting he enjoyed; the art of moulding images of the gods and goddesses he learnt from the potters. But arithmetic was his great aversion.

At the age of six or seven Gadadhar had his first experience of spiritual ecstasy. One day in June or July, when he was walking along a narrow path between paddy-fields, eating the puffed rice that he carried in a basket, he looked up at the sky and saw a beautiful, dark thunder-cloud. As it spread, rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flight of snow-white cranes passed in front of it. The beauty of the contrast overwhelmed the boy. He fell to the ground, unconscious, and the puffed rice went in all directions. Some villagers found him and carried him home in their arms. Gadadhar said later that in that state he had experienced an indescribable joy.

Gadadhar was seven years old when his father died. This incident profoundly affected him. For the first time the boy realized that life on earth was impermanent. Unobserved by others, he began to slip into the mango orchard or into one of the cremation grounds, and he spent hours absorbed in his own thoughts. He also became more helpful to his mother in the discharge of her

household duties. He gave more attention to reading and hearing the religious stories recorded in the Puranas. And he became interested in the wandering monks and pious pilgrims who would stop at Kamarpukur on their way to Puri. These holy men, the custodians of India's spiritual heritage and the living witnesses of the ideal of renunciation of the world and all-absorbing love of God, entertained the little boy with stories from the Hindu epics, stories of saints and prophets, and also stories of their own adventures. He, on his part, fetched their water and fuel and served them in various ways. Meanwhile, he was observing their meditation and worship.

At the age of nine, Gadadhar was inveswted with the *Sacred Thread.* This ceremony conferred upon him the privileges of his brahmin lineage, including the worship of the Family Deity, Raghuvir, and imposed upon him the many strict disciplines of a brahmin's life. During the ceremony of investiture he shocked his relatives by accepting a meal cooked by his nurse, a Sudra woman. His father would never have dreamt of doing such a thing. But in a playful mood Gadadhar had once promised this woman that he would eat her food, and now he fulfilled his plighted word. The woman had piety and religious sincerity, and these were more important to the boy than the conventions of society.

Gadadhar was now permitted to worship Raghuvir. Thus began his first training in meditation. He so gave his heart and soul to the worship that the stone image very soon appeared to him as the living Lord of the Universe. His tendency to lose himself in contemplation was first noticed at this time. Behind his boyish light-heartedness was seen a deepening of his spiritual nature.

About this time, on the Shivaratri night, consecrated to the worship of Shiva, a dramatic performance was arranged. The principal actor, who was to play the part of Shiva, suddenly fell ill, and Gaddhar was persuaded to act in his place. While friends were dressing him for the role of Shiva—smearing his body with ashes, matting his locks, placing a trident in his hand and a string of rudrakhsa beads around his neck—the boy appeared to become absent-minded. He approached the stage with slow and measured step, supported by his friends. He looked the living image of Shiva. The audience loudly applauded what it took to be his skill as an actor, but it was soon discovered that he was really lost in meditation. His countenance was radiant and tears flowed from his eyes. He was lost to the outer world. The effect of this scene on the audience was tremendous. The people felt blessed as by a vision of Shiva Himself. The performance had to be stopped, and the boy's mood lasted till the following morning.

Gadadhar himself now organized a dramatic company with his young friends. The stage was set in the mango orchard. The themes were selected from the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Gadadhar knew by heart almost

all the roles, having heard them from professional actors. His favourite theme was the Vrindavan episode of Krishna's life, depicting those exquisite love-stories of Krishna and the milkmaids and the cowherd boys. Gadadhar would play the parts of Radha or Krishna and would often lose himself in the character he was portraying. His natural feminine grace heightened the dramatic effect. The mango orchard would ring with the loud kirtan of the boys. Lost in song and merry-making, Gadadhar became indifferent to the routine of school.

In 1849 Ramkumar, the eldest son, went to Calcutta to improve the financial condition of the family.

Gadadhar was on the threshold of youth. He had become the pet of the women of the village. They loved to hear him talk, sing, or recite from the holy books. They enjoyed his knack of imitating voices. Their woman's instinct recognized the innate purity and guilelessness of this boy of clear skin, flowing hair, beaming eyes, smiling face, and inexhaustible fun. The pious elderly women looked upon him as Gopala, the Baby Krishna, and the younger ones saw in him the youthful Krishna of Vrindavan. He himself so idealised the love of the gopis for Krishna that he sometimes yearned to be born as a woman, if he must be born again, in order to be able to love Sri Krishna with all his heart and soul.

Coming to Calcutta

At the age of sixteen Gadadhar was summoned to Calcutta by his elder brother Ramkumar, who wished assistance in his priestly duties. Ramkumar had opened a Sanskrit academy to supplement his income, and it was his intention gradually to turn his younger brother's mind to education. Gadadhar applied himself heart and soul to his new duty as family priest to a number of Calcutta families. His worship was very different from that of the professional priests. He spent hours decorating the images and singing hymns and devotional songs; he performed with love the other duties of his office. People were impressed with his ardour. But to his studies he paid scant attention.

Ramkumar did not at first oppose the ways of his temperamental brother. He wanted Gadadhar to become used to the conditions of city life. But one day he decided to warn the boy about his indifference to the world. After all, in the near future Gadadhar must, as a householder, earn his livelihood through the performance of his brahminical duties; and these required a thorough knowledge of Hindu law, astrology, and kindred subjects. He gently admonished Gadadhar and asked him to pay more attention to his studies. But the boy replied spiritedly: "Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I

would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart and give me satisfaction for ever."

Bread-winning Education

The anguish of the inner soul of India found expression through these passionate words of the young Gadadhar. For what did his unsophisticated eyes see around him in Calcutta, at that time the metropolis of India and the centre of modern culture and learning? Greed and lust held sway in the higher levels of society, and the occasional religious practices were merely outer forms from which the soul had long ago departed. Gadadhar had never seen anything like this at Kamarpukur among the simple and pious villagers. The *sadhus* and wandering monks whom he had served in his boyhood had revealed to him an altogether different India. He had been impressed by their devotion and purity, their self-control and renunciation. He had learnt from them and from his own intuition that the ideal of life as taught by the ancient sages of India was the realization of God.

When Ramkumar reprimanded Gadadhar for neglecting a "bread-winning education", the inner voice of the boy reminded him that the legacy of his ancestors—the legacy of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Sankara, Ramanuja, Chaitanya—was not worldly security but the Knowledge of God. And these noble sages were the true representatives of Hindu society. Each of them was seated, as it were, on the crest of the wave that followed each successive trough in the tumultuous course of Indian national life. All demonstrated that the life current of India is spirituality. This truth was revealed to Gadadhar through that inner vision which scans past and future in one sweep, unobstructed by the barriers of time and space. But he was unaware of the history of the profound change that had taken place in the land of his birth during the previous one hundred years.

Hindu society during the eighteenth century had been passing through a period of decadence. It was the twilight of the Mussalman rule. There were anarchy and confusion in all spheres. Superstitious practices dominated the religious life of the people. Rites and rituals passed for the essence of spirituality. Greedy priests became the custodians of heaven. True philosophy was supplanted by dogmatic opinions. The pundits took delight in vain polemics.

In 1757 English traders laid the foundation of British rule in India. Gradually the Government was systematized and lawlessness suppressed. The Hindus were much impressed by the military power and political acumen of the new rulers. In the wake of the merchants came the English educators, and social reformers, and

Christian missionaries—all bearing a culture completely alien to the Hindu mind. In different parts of the country educational institutions were set up and Christian churches established. Hindu young men were offered the heady wine of the Western culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and they drank it to the very dregs.

The first effect of the draught on the educated Hindus was a complete effacement from their minds of the time-honoured beliefs and traditions of Hindu society. They came to believe that there was no transcendental Truth. The world perceived by the senses was all that existed. God and religion were illusions of the untutored mind. True knowledge could be derived only from the analysis of nature. So atheism and agnosticism became the fashion of the day. The youth of India, taught in English schools, took malicious delight in openly breaking the customs and traditions of their society. They would do away with the caste-system and remove the discriminatory laws about food. Social reform, the spread of secular education, widow remarriage, abolition of early marriage—they considered these the panacea for the degenerate condition of Hindu society.

The Christian missionaries gave the finishing touch to the process of transformation. They ridiculed as relics of a barbarous age the images and rituals of the Hindu religion. They tried to persuade India that the teachings of her saints and seers were the cause of her downfall, that her Vedas, Puranas, and other scriptures were filled with superstition. Christianity, they maintained, had given the white races position and power in this world and assurance of happiness in the next; therefore Christianity was the best of all religions. Many intelligent young Hindus became converted. The man in the street was confused. The majority of the educated grew materialistic in their mental outlook. Everyone living near Calcutta or the other strongholds of Western culture, even those who attempted to cling to the orthodox traditions of Hindu society, became infected by the new uncertainties and the new beliefs.

But the soul of India was to be resuscitated through a spiritual awakening. We hear the first call of this renascence in the spirited retort of the young Gadadhar: “Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education?”

Ramkumar could hardly understand the import of his young brother’s reply. He described in bright colours the happy and easy life of scholars in Calcutta society. But Gadadhar intuitively felt that the scholars, to use one of his own vivid illustrations, were like so many vultures, soaring high on the wings of their uninspired intellect, with their eyes fixed on the charnel-pit of greed and lust. So he stood firm and Ramkumar had to give way.

Kali Temple at Dakshineswar

At that time there lived in Calcutta a rich widow named Rani Rashmani, belonging to the Sudra caste, and known far and wide not only for her business ability, courage, and intelligence, but also for her largeness of heart, piety, and devotion to God. She was assisted in the management of her vast property by her son-in-law Mathur Mohan.

In 1847 the Rani purchased twenty acres of land at Dakshineswar, a village about four miles north of Calcutta. Here she created a temple garden and constructed several temples. Her Ishta, or Chosen Ideal, was the Divine Mother, Kali.

The temple garden stands directly on the east bank of the Ganges. The northern section of the land and a portion to the east contain an orchard, flower gardens, and two small reservoirs. The southern section is paved with brick and mortar. The visitor arriving by boat ascends the steps of an imposing bathing-Ghat, which leads to the *Chandni*, a roofed terrace, on either side of which stand in a row six temples of Shiva. East of the terrace and the Shiva temples is a large court, paved, rectangular in shape, and running north and south. Two temples stand in the centre of this court, the larger one, to the south and facing south, being dedicated to Kali, and the smaller one, facing the Ganges, to Radhakanta, that is, Krishna, the Consort of Radha. Nine domes with spires surmount the temple of Kali, and before it stands the spacious Natmandir, or music hall, the terrace of which is supported by stately pillars. At the northwest and southwest corners of the temple compound are two *Nahabats*, or music towers, from which music flows at different times of day, especially at sunup, noon, and sundown, when the worship is performed in the temples. Three sides of the paved courtyard—all except the west—are lined with rooms set apart for kitchens, store-rooms, dining-rooms, and quarters for the temple staff and guests. The chamber in the northwest angle, just beyond the last of the Shiva temples, is of special interest to us; for here Sri Ramakrishna was to spend a considerable part of his life. To the west of this chamber is a semicircular porch overlooking the river. In front of the porch runs a foot-path, north and south, and beyond the path is a large garden and, below the garden, the Ganges. The orchard to the north of the buildings contains the Panchavati, the banyan, and the bel-tree, associated with Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual practices. Outside and to the north of the temple compound proper is the *Kuthi*, or bungalow, used by members of Rani Rashmani’s family visiting the garden. And north of the temple garden, separated from it by a high wall, is a powder-magazine belonging to the British Government.

Shiva

In the twelve Shiva temples are installed the emblems of the Great God of renunciation in His various aspects, worshipped daily with proper rites. Shiva requires few articles of worship. White flowers and bel-leaves and a little Ganges water offered with devotion are enough to satisfy the benign Deity and win from Him the boon of liberation.

Radhakanta

The temple of Radhakanta, also known as the temple of Vishnu, contains the images of Radha and Krishna, the symbol of union with God through ecstatic love. The two images stand on a pedestal facing the west. The floor is paved with marble. From the ceiling of the porch hang chandeliers protected from dust by coverings of red cloth. Canvas screens shield the images from the rays of the setting sun. Close to the threshold of the inner shrine is a small brass cup containing holy water. Devoted visitors reverently drink a few drops from the vessel.

Kali

The main temple is dedicated to Kali, the Divine Mother, here worshipped as *Bhavatarini,* the Saviour of the Universe. The floor of this temple also is paved with marble. The basalt image of the Mother, dressed in gorgeous gold brocade, stands on a white marble image of the prostrate body of Her Divine Consort, Shiva, the symbol of the Absolute. On the feet of the Goddess are, among other ornaments, anklets of gold. Her arms are decked with jeweled ornaments of gold. She wears necklaces of gold and pearls, a golden garland of human heads, and a girdle of human arms. She wears a golden crown, golden ear-rings, and a golden nose-ring with a pearl-drop. She has four arms. The lower left hand holds a severed human head and the upper grips a blood-stained *sabre.* One right hand offers boons to Her children; the other allays their fear. The majesty of Her posture can hardly be described. It combines the terror of destruction with the reassurance of motherly tenderness. For She is the Cosmic Power, the totality of the universe, a glorious harmony of the pairs of opposites. She deals out death, as She creates and preserves. She has three eyes, the third being the symbol of Divine Wisdom; they strike dismay into the wicked, yet pour out affection for Her devotees.

The whole symbolic world is represented in the temple garden—the Trinity of

the Nature Mother (Kali), the Absolute (Shiva), and Love (Radhakanta), the Arch spanning heaven and earth. The terrific Goddess of the Tantra, the soul-enthralling Flute-Player of the Bhagavata, and the Self-absorbed Absolute of the Vedas live together, creating the greatest synthesis of religions. All aspects of Reality are represented there. But of this divine household, Kali is the pivot, the sovereign Mistress. She is *Prakriti,* the Procreatrix, Nature, the Destroyer, the Creator. Nay, She is something greater and deeper still for those who have eyes to see. She is the Universal Mother, "my Mother" as Ramakrishna would say, the All-powerful, who reveals Herself to Her children under different aspects and Divine Incarnations, the Visible God, who leads the elect to the Invisible Reality; and if it so pleases Her, She takes away the last trace of ego from created beings and merges it in the consciousness of the Absolute, the undifferentiated God. Through Her grace "the finite ego loses itself in the illimitable Ego-Atman-Brahman".

Rani Rashmani spent a fortune for the construction of the temple garden and another fortune for its dedication ceremony, which took place on May 31, 1855.

Sri Ramakrishna—henceforth we shall call Gadadhar by this familiar name—came to the temple garden with his elder brother Ramkumar, who was appointed priest of the Ka1i temple. Sri Ramakrishna did not at first approve of Ramkumar's working for the Sudra Rashmani. The example of their orthodox father was still fresh in Sri Ramakrishna's mind. He objected also to the eating of the cooked offerings of the temple, since, according to orthodox Hindu custom, such food can be offered to the Deity only in the house of a brahmin. But the holy atmosphere of the temple grounds, the solitude of the surrounding wood, the loving care of his brother, the respect shown him by Rani Rashmani and Mathur Babu, the living presence of the Goddess Kali in the temple, and, above all, the proximity of the sacred Ganges, which Sri Ramakrishna always held in the highest respect, gradually overcame his disapproval, and he began to feel at home.

Within a very short time Sri Ramakrishna attracted the notice of Mathur Babu, who was impressed by the young man's religious fervour and wanted him to participate in the worship in the Kali temple. But Sri Ramakrishna loved his freedom and was indifferent to any worldly career. The profession of the priesthood in a temple founded by a rich woman did not appeal to his mind. Further, he hesitated to take upon himself the responsibility for the ornaments and jewellery of the temple. Mathur had to wait for a suitable occasion.

At this time there came to Dakshineswar a youth of sixteen, destined to play an important role in Sri Ramakrishna's life. Hriday, a distant nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, hailed from Sihore, a village not far from Kamarpukur, and had

been his boyhood friend. Clever, exceptionally energetic, and endowed with great presence of mind, he moved, as will be seen later, like a shadow about his uncle and was always ready to help him, even at the sacrifice of his personal comfort. He was destined to be a mute witness of many of the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and the caretaker of his body during the stormy days of his spiritual practice. Hriday came to Dakshineswar in search of a job, and Sri Ramakrishna was glad to see him.

Unable to resist the persuasion of Mathur Babu, Sri Ramakrishna at last entered the temple service, on condition that Hriday should be asked to assist him. His first duty was to dress and decorate the image of Kali.

One day the priest of the Radhakanta temple accidentally dropped the image of Krishna on the floor, breaking one of its legs. The pundits advised the Rani to install a new image, since the worship of an image with a broken limb was against the scriptural injunctions. But the Rani was fond of the image, and she asked Sri Ramakrishna's opinion. In an abstracted mood, he said: "This solution is ridiculous. If a son-in-law of the Rani broke his leg, would she discard him and put another in his place? Wouldn't she rather arrange for his treatment? Why should she not do the same thing in this case too? Let the image be repaired and worshipped as before." It was a simple, straightforward solution and was accepted by the Rani. Sri Ramakrishna himself mended the break. The priest was dismissed for his carelessness, and at Mathur Babu's earnest request, Sri Ramakrishna accepted the Office of priest in the Radhakanta temple.

Sri Ramakrishna as a priest

Born in an orthodox brahmin family, Sri Ramakrishna knew the formalities of worship, its rites and rituals. The innumerable gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion are the human aspects of the indescribable and incomprehensible Spirit, as conceived by the finite human mind. They understand and appreciate human love and emotion, help men to realize their secular and spiritual ideals, and ultimately enable men to attain liberation from the miseries of phenomenal life. The Source of light, intelligence, wisdom, and strength is the One alone from whom comes the fulfilment of desire. Yet, as long as a man is bound by his human limitations, he cannot but worship God through human forms. He must use human symbols. Therefore Hinduism asks the devotees to look on God as the ideal father, the ideal mother, the ideal husband, the ideal son, or the ideal friend. But the name ultimately leads to the Nameless, the form to the Formless, the word to the Silence, the emotion to the serene realization of Peace in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. The gods gradually merge in the one God.

But until that realization is achieved, the devotee cannot dissociate human factors from his worship. Therefore the Deity is bathed and clothed and decked with ornaments. He is fed and put to sleep. He is propitiated with hymns, songs, and prayers. And there are appropriate rites connected with all these functions. For instance, to secure for himself external purity, the priest bathes himself in holy water and puts on a holy cloth. He purifies the mind and the sense organs by appropriate meditations. He fortifies the place of worship against evil forces by drawing around it circles of fire and water. He awakens the different spiritual centres of the body and invokes the Supreme Spirit in his heart. Then he transfers the Supreme Spirit to the image before him and worships the image, regarding it no longer as clay or stone, but as the embodiment of Spirit, throbbing with Life and Consciousness. After the worship the Supreme Spirit is recalled from the image to Its true sanctuary, the heart of the priest. The real devotee knows the absurdity of worshipping the Transcendental Reality with material articles—clothing That which pervades the whole universe and the beyond, putting on a pedestal That which cannot be limited by space, feeding That which is disembodied and incorporeal, singing before That whose glory the music of the spheres tries vainly to proclaim. But through these rites the devotee aspires to go ultimately beyond rites and rituals, forms and names, words and praise, and to realize God as the All-pervading Consciousness.

Hindu priests are thoroughly acquainted with the rites of worship, but few of them are aware of their underlying significance. They move their hands and limbs mechanically, in obedience to the letter of the scriptures, and repeat the holy mantras like parrots. But from the very beginning the inner meaning of these rites was revealed to Sri Ramakrishna. As he sat facing the image, a strange transformation came over his mind. While going through the prescribed ceremonies, he would actually find himself encircled by a wall of fire protecting him and the place of worship from unspiritual vibrations, or he would feel the rising of the mystic Kundalini through the different centres of the body. The glow on his face, his deep absorption, and the intense atmosphere of the temple impressed everyone who saw him worship the Deity.

Ramkumar wanted Sri Ramakrishna to learn the intricate rituals of the worship of Kali. To become a priest of Kali one must undergo a special form of initiation from a qualified guru, and for Sri Ramakrishna a suitable brahmin was found. But no sooner did the brahmin speak the holy word in his ear than Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with emotion, uttered a loud cry and plunged into deep concentration.

Mathur begged Sri Ramakrishna to take charge of the worship in the Kali temple. The young priest pleaded his incompetence and his ignorance of the

scriptures. Mathur insisted that devotion and sincerity would more than compensate for any lack of formal knowledge and make the Divine Mother manifest Herself through the image. In the end, Sri Ramakrishna had to yield to Mathur's request. He became the priest of Kali.

In 1856 Ramkumar breathed his last. Sri Ramakrishna had already witnessed more than one death in the family. He had come to realize how impermanent is life on earth. The more he was convinced of the transitory nature of worldly things, the more eager he became to realize God, the Fountain of Immortality.

The First Vision of Kali

And, indeed, he soon discovered what a strange Goddess he had chosen to serve. He became gradually enmeshed in the web of Her all-pervading presence. To the ignorant She is to be sure, the image of destruction: but he found in Her the benign, all-loving Mother. Her neck is encircled with a garland of heads, and Her waist with a girdle of human arms and two of Her hands hold weapons of death, and Her eyes dart a glance of fire; but, strangely enough, Ramakrishna felt in Her breath the soothing touch of tender love and saw in Her the Seed of Immortality. She stands on the bosom of Her Consort, Shiva; it is because She is the Shakti, the Power, inseparable from the Absolute. She is surrounded by jackals and other unholy creatures, the denizens of the cremation ground. But is not the Ultimate Reality above holiness and unholiness? She appears to be reeling under the spell of wine. But who would create this mad world unless under the influence of a divine drunkenness? She is the highest symbol of all the forces of nature, the synthesis of their antinomies, the Ultimate Divine in the form of woman. She now became to Sri Ramakrishna the only Reality, and the world became an unsubstantial shadow. Into Her worship he poured his soul. Before him She stood as the transparent portal to the shrine of Ineffable Reality.

The worship in the temple intensified Sri Ramakrishna's yearning for a living vision of the Mother of the Universe. He began to spend in meditation the time not actually employed in the temple service; and for this purpose he selected an extremely solitary place. A deep jungle, thick with underbrush and prickly plants, lay to the north of the temples. Used at one time as a burial ground, it was shunned by people even during the day-time for fear of ghosts. There Sri Ramakrishna began to spend the whole night in meditation, returning to his room only in the morning with eyes swollen as though from much weeping. While meditating, he would lay aside his cloth and his brahminical thread. Explaining this strange conduct, he once said to Hriday: "Don't you know that when one thinks of God one should be freed from all ties? From our very birth

we have the eight fetters of hatred, shame, lineage, pride of good conduct, fear, secretiveness, caste, and grief. The sacred thread reminds me that I am a brahmin and therefore superior to all. When calling on the Mother one has to set aside all such ideas." Hriday thought his uncle was becoming insane.

As his love for God deepened, he began either to forget or to drop the formalities of worship. Sitting before the image, he would spend hours singing the devotional songs of great devotees of the Mother, such as Kamalakanta and Ramprasad. Those rhapsodical songs, describing the direct vision of God, only intensified Sri Ramakrishna's longing. He felt the pangs of a child separated from its mother. Sometimes, in agony, he would rub his face against the ground and weep so bitterly that people, thinking he had lost his earthly mother, would sympathize with him in his grief. Sometimes, in moments of scepticism, he would cry: "Art Thou true, Mother, or is it all fiction —mere poetry without any reality? If Thou dost exist, why do I not see Thee? Is religion a mere fantasy and art Thou only a figment of man's imagination?" Sometimes he would sit on the prayer carpet for two hours like an inert object. He began to behave in an abnormal manner, most of the time unconscious of the world. He almost gave up food; and sleep left him altogether.

But he did not have to wait very long. He has thus described his first vision of the Mother: "I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. I was overpowered with a great restlessness and a fear that it might not be my lot to realize Her in this life. I could not bear the separation from Her any longer. Life seemed to be not worth living. Suddenly my glance fell on the sword that was kept in the Mother's temple. I determined to put an end to my life. When I jumped up like a madman and seized it, suddenly the blessed Mother revealed Herself. The buildings with their different parts, the temple, and everything else vanished from my sight, leaving no trace whatsoever, and in their stead I saw a limitless, infinite, effulgent Ocean of Consciousness. As far as the eye could see, the shining billows were madly rushing at me from all sides with a terrific noise, to swallow me up! I was panting for breath. I was caught in the rush and collapsed, unconscious. What was happening in the outside world I did not know; but within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss, altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother." On his lips when he regained consciousness of the world was the word "Mother".

God-Intoxicated State

Yet this was only a foretaste of the intense experiences to come. The first glimpse of the Divine Mother made him the more eager for Her uninterrupted

vision. He wanted to see Her both in meditation and with eyes open. But the Mother began to play a teasing game of hide-and-seek with him, intensifying both his joy and his suffering. Weeping bitterly during the moments of separation from Her, he would pass into a trance and then find Her standing before him, smiling, talking, consoling, bidding him be of good cheer, and instructing him. During this period of spiritual practice he had many uncommon experiences. When he sat to meditate, he would hear strange clicking sounds in the joints of his legs, as if someone were locking them up, one after the other, to keep him motionless; and at the conclusion of his meditation he would again hear the same sounds, this time unlocking them and leaving him free to move about. He would see flashes like a swarm of fire-flies floating before his eyes, or a sea of deep mist around him, with luminous waves of molten silver. Again, from a sea of translucent mist he would behold the Mother rising, first Her feet, then Her waist, body, face, and head, finally Her whole person; he would feel Her breath and hear Her voice. Worshipping in the temple, sometimes he would become exalted, sometimes he would remain motionless as stone, sometimes he would almost collapse from excessive emotion. Many of his actions, contrary to all tradition, seemed sacrilegious to the people. He would take a flower and touch it to his own head, body, and feet, and then offer it to the Goddess. Or, like a drunkard, he would reel to the throne of the Mother, touch Her chin by way of showing his affection for Her, and sing, talk, joke, laugh, and dance. Or he would take a morsel of food from the plate and hold it to Her mouth, begging Her to eat it, and would not be satisfied till he was convinced that She had really eaten. After the Mother had been put to sleep at night, from his own room he would hear Her ascending to the upper storey of the temple with the light steps of a happy girl, Her anklets jingling. Then he would discover Her standing with flowing hair, Her black form silhouetted against the sky of the night looking at the Ganges or at the distant lights of Calcutta.

Naturally the temple officials took him for an insane person. His worldly well-wishers brought him to skilled physicians; but no medicine could cure his malady. Many a time he doubted his sanity himself. For he had been sailing across an uncharted sea, with no earthly guide to direct him. His only haven of security was the Divine Mother Herself. To Her he would pray: “I do not know what these things are. I am ignorant of mantras and the scriptures. Teach me, Mother, how to realize Thee. Who else can help me? Art Thou not my only refuge and guide?” And the sustaining presence of the Mother never failed him in his distress or doubt. Even those who criticized his conduct were greatly impressed with his purity, guilelessness, truthfulness, integrity, and holiness. They felt an uplifting influence in his presence.

It is said that Samadhi, or trance, no more than opens the portal of the spiritual realm. Sri Ramakrishna felt an unquenchable desire to enjoy God in various ways. For his meditation he built a place in the northern wooded section of the temple garden. With Hriday's help he planted there five sacred trees. The spot, known as the Panchavati, became the scene of many of his visions.

As his spiritual mood deepened he more and more felt himself to be a child of the Divine Mother. He learnt to surrender himself completely to Her will and let Her direct him.

"O Mother," he would constantly pray, "I have taken refuge in Thee. Teach me what to do and what to say. Thy will is paramount everywhere and is for the good of Thy children. Merge my will in Thy will and make me Thy instrument."

His visions became deeper and more intimate. He no longer had to meditate to behold the Divine Mother. Even while retaining consciousness of the outer world, he would see Her as tangibly as the temples, the trees, the river, and the men around him.

On a certain occasion Mathur Babu stealthily entered the temple to watch the worship. He was profoundly moved by the young priest's devotion and sincerity. He realized that Sri Ramakrishna had transformed the stone image into the living Goddess.

Sri Ramakrishna one day fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to Kali. This was too much for the manager of the temple garden, who considered himself responsible for the proper conduct of the worship. He reported Sri Ramakrishna's insane behaviour to Mathur Babu.

Sri Ramakrishna has described the incident: "The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss—the Bliss of God. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this was the Divine Mother—even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Babu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Babu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager: 'Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.' "

One of the painful ailments from which Sri Ramakrishna suffered at this time was a burning sensation in his body, and he was cured by a strange vision.

During worship in the temple, following the scriptural injunctions, he would imagine the presence of the “sinner” in himself and the destruction of this “sinner”. One day he was meditating in the Panchavati, when he saw come out of him a red-eyed man of black complexion, reeling like a drunkard. Soon there emerged from him another person, of serene countenance, wearing the ochre cloth of a sannyasi and carrying in his hand a trident. The second person attacked the first and killed him with the trident. Thereafter Sri Ramakrishna was free of his pain.

About this time he began to worship God by assuming the attitude of a servant toward his master. He imitated the mood of Hanuman, the monkey chieftain of the Ramayana, the ideal servant of Rama and traditional model for this self-effacing form of devotion. When he meditated on Hanuman his movements and his way of life began to resemble those of a monkey. His eyes became restless. He lived on fruits and roots. With his cloth tied around his waist, a portion of it hanging in the form of a tail, he jumped from place to place instead of walking. And after a short while he was blessed with a vision of Sita, the divine consort of Rama, who entered his body and disappeared there with the words, “I bequeath to you my smile.”

Mathur had faith in the sincerity of Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual zeal, but began now to doubt his sanity. He had watched him jumping about like a monkey. One day, when Rani Rashmani was listening to Sri Ramakrishna’s singing in the temple, the young priest abruptly turned and slapped her. Apparently listening to his song, she had actually been thinking of a lawsuit. She accepted the punishment as though the Divine Mother Herself had imposed it; but Mathur was distressed. He begged Sri Ramakrishna to keep his feelings under control and to heed the conventions of society. God Himself, he argued, follows laws. God never permitted, for instance, flowers of two colours to grow on the same stalk. The following day Sri Ramakrishna presented Mathur Babu with two hibiscus flowers growing on the same stalk, one red and one white.

Mathur and Rani Rashmani began to ascribe the mental ailment of Sri Ramakrishna in part, at least, to his observance of rigid continence. Thinking that a natural life would relax the tension of his nerves, they engineered a plan with two women of ill fame. But as soon as the women entered his room, Sri Ramakrishna beheld in them the manifestation of the Divine Mother of the Universe and went into Samadhi uttering Her name.

Haladhari

In 1858 there came to Dakshineswar a cousin of Sri Ramakrishna, Haladhari

by name, who was to remain there about eight years. On account of Sri Ramakrishna's indifferent health, Mathur appointed this man to the office of priest in the Kali temple. He was a complex character, versed in the letter of the scriptures, but hardly aware of their spirit. He loved to participate in hair-splitting theological discussions and, by the measure of his own erudition, he proceeded to gauge Sri Ramakrishna. An orthodox brahmin, he thoroughly disapproved of his cousin's unorthodox actions, but he was not unimpressed by Sri Ramakrishna's purity of life, ecstatic love of God, and yearning for realization.

One day Haladhari upset Sri Ramakrishna with the statement that God is incomprehensible to the human mind. Sri Ramakrishna has described the great moment of doubt when he wondered whether his visions had really misled him: "With sobs I prayed to the Mother, 'Canst Thou have the heart to deceive me like this because I am a fool?' A stream of tears flowed from my eyes. Shortly afterwards I saw a volume of mist rising from the floor and filling the space before me. In the midst of it there appeared a face with flowing beard, calm, highly expressive, and fair. Fixing its gaze steadily upon me, it said solemnly, 'Remain in *Bhava-mukha,* on the threshold of relative consciousness.' This was repeated three times and then it gently disappeared in the mist, which itself dissolved. This vision reassured me."

A garbled report of Sri Ramakrishna's failing health, indifference to worldly life, and various abnormal activities reached Kamarpukur and filled the heart of his poor mother with anguish. At her repeated request he returned to his village for a change of air. But his boyhood friends did not interest him any more. A divine fever was consuming him. He spent a great part of the day and night in one of the cremation grounds, in meditation. The place reminded him of the impermanence of the human body, of human hopes and achievements. It also reminded him of Kali, the Goddess of destruction.

Marriage and After

But in a few months his health showed improvement, and he recovered to some extent his natural buoyancy of spirit. His happy mother was encouraged to think it might be a good time to arrange his marriage. The boy was now twenty-three years old. A wife would bring him back to earth. And she was delighted when her son welcomed her suggestion. Perhaps he saw in it the finger of God.

Saradamani, a little girl of five, lived in the neighbouring village called Jayrambati. Even at this age she had been praying to God to make her character as stainless and fragrant as the white tuberose. Looking at the full moon, she

would say: “O God, there are dark spots even on the moon. But make my character spotless.” It was she who was selected as the bride for Sri Ramakrishna.

The marriage ceremony was duly performed. Such early marriage in India is in the nature of a betrothal, the marriage being consummated when the girl attains puberty. But in this case the marriage remained for ever unconsummated. Sri Ramakrishna lived at Kamarpukur about a year and a half and then returned to Dakshineswar.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold of the Kali temple when he found himself again in the whirlwind. His madness reappeared tenfold. The same meditation and prayer, the same ecstatic moods, the same burning sensation, the same weeping, the same sleeplessness, the same indifference to the body and the outside world, the same divine delirium. He subjected himself to fresh disciplines in order to eradicate greed and lust, the two great impediments to spiritual progress. With a rupee in one hand and some earth in the other, he would reflect on the comparative value of these two for the realization of God, and finding them equally worthless he would toss them, with equal indifference, into the Ganges. Women he regarded as the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Never even in a dream did he feel the impulses of lust. And to root out of his mind the idea of caste superiority, he cleaned a pariah’s house with his long and neglected hair. When he would sit in meditation, birds would perch on his head and peck in his hair for grains of food. Snakes would crawl over his body, and neither would he aware of the other. Sleep left him altogether. Day and night, visions flitted before him. He saw the sannyasi who had previously killed the “sinner” in him again coming out of his body, threatening him with the trident, and ordering him to concentrate on God. Or the same sannyasi would visit distant places, following a luminous path, and bring him reports of what was happening there. Sri Ramakrishna used to say later that in the case of an advanced devotee the mind itself becomes the guru, living and moving like an embodied being.

Rani Rashmani, the foundress of the temple garden, passed away in 1861. After her death her son-in-law Mathur became the sole executor of the estate. He placed himself and his resources at the disposal of Sri Ramakrishna and began to look after his physical comfort. Sri Ramakrishna later spoke of him as one of his five “suppliers of stores” appointed by the Divine Mother. Whenever a desire arose in his mind, Mathur fulfilled it without hesitation.

The Brahmani

There came to Dakshineswar at this time a brahmin woman who was to play an important part in Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual unfoldment. Born in East Bengal, she was an adept in the Tantrik and Vaishnava methods of worship. She was slightly over fifty years of age, handsome, and garbed in the orange robe of a nun. Her sole possessions were a few books and two pieces of wearing-cloth.

Sri Ramakrishna welcomed the visitor with great respect, described to her his experiences and visions, and told her of people's belief that these were symptoms of madness. She listened to him attentively and said: "My son, everyone in this world is mad. Some are mad for money, some for creature comforts, some for name and fame; and you are mad for God." She assured him that he was passing through the almost unknown spiritual experience described in the scriptures as *Maha–bhava*, the most exalted rapture of divine love. She told him that this extreme exaltation had been described as manifesting itself through nineteen physical symptoms, including the shedding of tears, a tremor of the body, horripilation, perspiration, and a burning sensation. The Bhakti scriptures, she declared, had recorded only two instances of the experience, namely, those of Sri Radha and Sri Chaitanya.

Very soon a tender relationship sprang up between Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmani, she looking upon him as the Baby Krishna, and he upon her as mother. Day after day, she watched his ecstasy during the kirtan and meditation, his Samadhi, his mad yearning; and she recognized in him a power to transmit spirituality to others. She came to the conclusion that such things were not possible for an ordinary devotee, not even for a highly developed soul. Only an Incarnation of God was capable of such spiritual manifestations. She proclaimed openly that Sri Ramakrishna, like Sri Chaitanya, was an Incarnation of God.

When Sri Ramakrishna told Mathur what the Brahmani had said about him, Mathur shook his head in doubt. He was reluctant to accept him as an Incarnation of God, an Avatar comparable to Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Chaitanya, though he admitted Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary spirituality. Whereupon the Brahmani asked Mathur to arrange a conference of scholars who should discuss the matter with her. He agreed to the proposal and the meeting was arranged. It was to be held in the Natmandir in front of the Kali temple.

Two famous pundits of the time were invited: Vaishnavcharan, the leader of the Vaishnava society, and Gauri. The first to arrive was Vaishnavcharan, with a distinguished company of scholars and devotees. The Brahmani, like a proud mother, proclaimed her view before him and supported it with quotations from the scriptures. As the pundits discussed the deep theological question, Sri Ramakrishna, perfectly indifferent to everything happening around him, sat in their midst like a child, immersed in his own thoughts, sometimes smiling,

sometimes chewing a pinch of spices from a pouch, or again saying to Vaishnavcharan with a nudge: “Look here. Sometimes I feel like this, too.” Presently Vaishnavcharan arose to declare himself in total agreement with the view of the Brahmani. He declared that Sri Ramakrishna had undoubtedly experienced *Maha-bhava* and that this was the certain sign of the rare manifestation of God in a man. The people assembled there, especially the officers of the temple garden, were struck dumb. Sri Ramakrishna said to Mathur, like a boy: “Just fancy, he too says so! Well, I am glad to learn that, after all, it is not a disease.”

When, a few days later, Pundit Gauri arrived, another meeting was held, and he agreed with the view of the Brahmani and Vaishnavcharan. To Sri Ramakrishna’s remark that Vaishnavcharan had declared him to be an *Avatar,* Gauri replied: “Is that all he has to say about you? Then he has said very little. I am fully convinced that you are that Mine of Spiritual Power, only a small fraction of which descends on earth, from time to time, in the form of an Incarnation.”

“Ah!” said Sri Ramakrishna with a smile, “You seem to have quite outbid Vaishnavcharan in this matter. What have you found in me that makes you entertain such an idea?”

Gauri said: “I feel it in my heart and I have the scriptures on my side. I am ready to prove it to anyone who challenges me.”

“Well,” Sri Ramakrishna said, “it is you who say so; but, believe me, I know nothing about it.”

Thus, the insane priest was, by verdict of the great scholars of the day, proclaimed a Divine Incarnation. His visions were not the result of an over heated brain; they had precedent in spiritual history. And how did the proclamation affect Sri Ramakrishna himself? He remained the simple child of the Mother that he had been since the first day of his life. Years later, when two of his householder disciples openly spoke of him as a Divine Incarnation and the matter was reported to him, he said with a touch of sarcasm: “Do they think they will enhance my glory that way? One of them is an actor on the stage and the other a physician. What do they know about Incarnations? Why years ago pundits like Gauri and Vaishnavcharan declared me to be an Avatar. They were great scholars and knew what they said. But that did not make any change in my mind.”

Sri Ramakrishna was a learner all his life. He often used to quote a proverb to his disciples: “Friend, the more I live the more I learn.” When the excitement

created by the Brahmani's declaration was over, he set himself to the task of practising spiritual disciplines according to the traditional methods laid down in the Tantra and Vaishnava scriptures. Hitherto he had pursued his spiritual ideal according to the promptings of his own mind and heart. Now he accepted the Brahmani as his guru and set foot on the traditional highways.

Tantra

According to the Tantra, the Ultimate Reality is *Chit*, or Consciousness, which is identical with *Sat*, or Being, and with *Ananda*, or Bliss. This Ultimate Reality, *Satchidananda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, is identical with the Reality preached in the Vedas. And man is identical with this Reality; but under the influence of *Maya*, or illusion, he has forgotten his true nature. He takes to be real a merely apparent world of subject and object, and this error is the cause of his bondage and suffering. The goal of spiritual discipline is the rediscovery of his true identity with the divine Reality.

For the achievement of this goal the Vedanta prescribes an austere negative method of discrimination and renunciation, which can be followed by only a few individuals endowed with sharp intelligence and unshakeable will-power. But Tantra takes into consideration the natural weakness of human beings, their lower appetites, and their love for the concrete. It combines philosophy with rituals, meditation with ceremonies, renunciation with enjoyment. The underlying purpose is gradually to train the aspirant to meditate on his identity with the Ultimate.

The average man wishes to enjoy the material objects of the world. Tantra bids him enjoy these, but at the same time, discover in them the presence of God. Mystical rites are prescribed by which, slowly, the sense objects become spiritualized and sense attraction is transformed into a love of God. So the very "bonds" of man are turned into "releasers". The very poison that kills is transmuted into the elixir of life. Outward renunciation is not necessary. Thus, the aim of Tantra is to sublimate *Bhoga*, or enjoyment, into *Yoga*, or union with Consciousness. For, according to this philosophy, the world with all its manifestations is nothing but the sport of Shiva and Shakti, the Absolute and Its inscrutable Power.

The disciplines of Tantra are graded to suit aspirants of all degrees. Exercises are prescribed for people with "animal", "heroic", and "divine" outlooks. Certain of the rites require the presence of members of the opposite sex. Here the aspirant learns to look on woman as the embodiment of the Goddess Kali, the Mother of the Universe. The very basis of Tantra is the Motherhood of God and

the glorification of woman. Every part of a woman's body is to be regarded as incarnate Divinity. But the rites are extremely dangerous. The help of a qualified guru is absolutely necessary. An unwary devotee may lose his foothold and fall into a pit of depravity.

According to the Tantra, Shakti is the active creative force in the universe. Shiva, the Absolute, is a more or less passive principle. Further, Shakti is as inseparable from Shiva as fire's power to burn is from fire itself. Shakti, the Creative Power, contains in Its womb the universe, and therefore is the Divine Mother. All women are Her symbols. Kali is one of Her several forms. The meditation on Kali, the Creative Power, is the central discipline of the Tantra. While meditating, the aspirant at first regards himself as one with the Absolute and then thinks that out of that Impersonal Consciousness emerge two entities, namely, his own self and the living form of the Goddess. He then projects the Goddess into the tangible image before him and worships it as the Divine Mother.

Sri Ramakrishna set himself to the task of practising the disciplines of Tantra; and at the bidding of the Divine Mother Herself he accepted the Brahmani as his guru. He performed profound and delicate ceremonies in the Panchavati and under the bel-tree at the northern extremity of the temple compound. He practised all the disciplines of the sixty-four principal Tantra books, and it took him never more than three days to achieve the result promised in any one of them. After the observance of a few preliminary rites, he would be overwhelmed with a strange divine fervour and would go into Samadhi, where his mind would dwell in exaltation. Evil ceased to exist for him. The word "carnal" lost its meaning. The whole world and everything in it appeared as the Lila, the sport, of Shiva and Shakti. He beheld everywhere manifest the power and beauty of the Mother, the whole world, animate and inanimate, appeared to him as pervaded with Chit, Consciousness, and with Ananda, Bliss.

He saw in a vision the Ultimate Cause of the universe as a huge luminous triangle giving birth every moment to an infinite number of worlds. He heard the *Anahata Shabda,* the great sound Om, of which the innumerable sounds of the universe are only so many echoes. He acquired the eight supernatural powers of Yoga, which make a man almost omnipotent, and these he spurned as of no value whatsoever to the Spirit. He had a vision of the divine Maya, the inscrutable Power of God, by which the universe is created and sustained, and into which it is finally absorbed. In this vision he saw a woman of exquisite beauty, about to become a mother, emerging from the Ganges and slowly approaching the Panchavati. Presently she gave birth to a child and began to nurse it tenderly. A moment later she assumed a terrible aspect, seized the child with her grim jaws

and crushed it. Swallowing it, she re-entered the waters of the Ganges.

But the most remarkable experience during this period was the awakening of the *Kundalini Shakti*, the "Serpent Power". He actually saw the Power, at first lying asleep at the bottom of the spinal column, then waking up and ascending along the mystic *Sushumna* canal and through its six centres, or lotuses, to the *Sahasrara,* the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head. He further saw that as the Kundalini went upward the different lotuses bloomed. And this phenomenon was accompanied by visions and trances. Later on he described to his disciples and devotees the various movements of the Kundalini: the fishlike, birdlike, monkey like, and so on. The awakening of the Kundalini is the beginning of spiritual consciousness, and its union with Shiva in the *Sahasrara,* ending in Samadhi, is the consummation of the Tantrik disciplines.

About this time it was revealed to him that in a short while many devotees would seek his guidance.

Vaishnava Disciplines

After completing the Tantrik sadhana Sri Ramakrishna followed the Brahmani in the disciplines of Vaishnavism. The Vaishnavas are worshippers of Vishnu, the "All-pervading", the Supreme God, who is also known as Hari and Narayana. Of Vishnu's various Incarnations the two with the largest number of followers are Rama and Krishna.

Vaishnavism is exclusively a religion of bhakti. Bhakti is intense love of God, attachment to Him alone; it is of the nature of bliss and bestows upon the lover immortality and liberation. God, according to Vaishnavism, cannot be realized through logic or reason; and, without bhakti, all penances, austerities, and rites are futile. Man cannot realize God by self-exertion alone. For the vision of God His grace is absolutely necessary, and this grace is felt by the pure of heart. The mind is to be purified through bhakti. The pure mind then remains for ever immersed in the ecstasy of God-vision. It is the cultivation of this divine love that is the chief concern of the Vaishnava religion.

There are three kinds of formal devotion: tamasic, rajasic, and sattvic. If a person, while showing devotion to God, is actuated by malevolence, arrogance, jealousy, or anger, then his devotion is tamasic, since it is influenced by tamas, the quality of inertia. If he worships God from a desire for fame or wealth, or from any other worldly ambition, then his devotion is rajasic, since it is influenced by rajas, the quality of activity. But if a person loves God without any thought of material gain, if he performs his duties to please God alone and maintains toward all created beings the attitude of friendship, then his devotion

is called sattvic, since it is influenced by sattva, the quality of harmony. But the highest devotion transcends the three *gunas,* or qualities, being a spontaneous, uninterrupted inclination of the mind toward God, the Inner Soul of all beings; and it wells up in the heart of a true devotee as soon as he hears the name of God or mention of God's attributes. A devotee possessed of this love would not accept the happiness of heaven if it were offered him. His one desire is to love God under all conditions—in pleasure and pain, life and death, honour and dishonour, prosperity and adversity.

There are two stages of bhakti. The first is known as *Vaidhi–Bhakti,* or love of God qualified by scriptural injunctions. For the devotees of this stage are prescribed regular and methodical worship, hymns, prayers, the repetition of God's name, and the chanting of His glories. This lower bhakti in course of time matures into *Para–Bhakti,* or supreme devotion, known also as *Prema*, the most intense form of divine love. Divine love is an end in itself. It exists potentially in all human hearts, but in the case of bound creatures it is misdirected to earthly objects.

To develop the devotee's love for God, Vaishnavism humanises God. God is to be regarded as the devotee's Parent, Master, Friend, Child, Husband, or Sweetheart, each succeeding relationship representing an intensification of love. These *Bhavas,* or attitudes toward God, are known as Shanta, Dasya, Sakhya, Vatsalya, and Madhur. The rishis of the Vedas, Hanuman, the cowherd boys of Vrindavan, Rama's mother Kausalya, and Radhika, Krishna's sweetheart, exhibited, respectively, the most perfect examples of these forms. In the ascending scale the glories of God are gradually forgotten and the devotee realizes more and more the intimacy of divine communion. Finally he regards himself as the mistress of his Beloved, and no artificial barrier remains to separate him from his Ideal. No social or moral obligation can bind to the earth his soaring spirit. He experiences perfect union with the Godhead. Unlike the Vedantist, who strives to transcend all varieties of the subject-object relationship, a devotee of the Vaishnava path wishes to retain both his own individuality and the personality of God. To him God is not an intangible Absolute, but the *Purushottama,* the Supreme Person.

While practising the discipline of the Madhur Bhava, the male devotee often regards himself as a woman, in order to develop the most intense form of love for Sri Krishna, the only *Purusha,* or man, in the universe. This assumption of the attitude of the opposite sex has a deep psychological significance. It is a matter of common experience that an idea may be cultivated to such an intense degree that every idea alien to it is driven from the mind. This peculiarity of the mind may he utilised for the subjugation of the lower desires and the

development of the spiritual nature. Now, the idea which is the basis of all desires and passions in a man is the conviction of his indissoluble association with a male body. If he can inoculate himself thoroughly with the idea that he is a woman, he can get rid of the desires peculiar to his male body. Again, the idea that he is a woman may in turn be made to give way to another higher idea, namely, that he is neither man nor woman, but the Impersonal Spirit. The Impersonal Spirit alone can enjoy real communion with the Impersonal God. Hence the highest realization of the Vaishnava draws close to the transcendental experience of the Vedantist.

A beautiful expression of the Vaishnava worship of God through love is to be found in the Vrindavan episode of the Bhagavata. The gopis, or milk-maids, of Vrindavan regarded the six-year-old Krishna as their Beloved. They sought no personal gain or happiness from this love. They surrendered to Krishna their bodies, minds, and souls. Of all the gopis, Radhika, or Radha, because of her intense love for Him, was the closest to Krishna. She manifested Maha–bhava and was united with her Beloved. This union represents, through sensuous language, a supersensuous experience.

Sri Chaitanya, also known as Gauranga, Gora, or Nimai, born in Bengal in 1485 and regarded as an Incarnation of God, is a great prophet of the Vaishnava religion. Chaitanya declared the chanting of God’s name to be the most efficacious spiritual discipline for the Kali–Yuga.

Sri Ramakrishna, as the monkey Hanuman, had already worshipped God as his Master. Through his devotion to Kali he had worshipped God as his Mother. He was now to take up the other relationships prescribed by the Vaishnava scriptures.

Ramlala

About the year 1864 there came to Dakshineswar a wandering Vaishnava monk, Jatadhari, whose Ideal Deity was Rama. He always carried with him a small metal image of the Deity, which he called by the endearing name of Ramlala, the Boy Rama. Toward this little image he displayed the tender affection of Kausalya for her divine Son, Rama. As a result of lifelong spiritual practice he had actually found in the metal image the presence of his Ideal. Ramlala was no longer for him a metal image, but the living God. He devoted himself to nursing Rama, feeding Rama, playing with Rama, taking Rama for a walk, and bathing Rama. And he found that the image responded to his love.

Sri Ramakrishna, much impressed with his devotion, requested Jatadhari to spend a few days at Dakshineúwar. Soon Ramlala became the favourite

companion of Sri Ramakrishna too. Later on he described to the devotees how the little image would dance gracefully before him, jump on his back, insist on being taken in his arms, run to the fields in the sun, pluck flowers from the bushes, and play pranks like a naughty boy. A very sweet relationship sprang up between him and Ramlala, for whom he felt the love of a mother.

One day Jatadhari requested Sri Ramakrishna to keep the image and bade him adieu with tearful eyes. He declared that Ramlala had fulfilled his innermost prayer and that he now had no more need of formal worship. A few days later Sri Ramakrishna was blessed through Ramlala with a vision of Ramachandra, whereby he realized that the Rama of the Ramayana, the son of Dasaratha, pervades the whole universe as Spirit and Consciousness; that He is its Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer; that, in still another aspect, He is the transcendental Brahman, without form, attribute, or name.

While worshipping Ramlala as the Divine Child, Sri Ramakrishna's heart became filled with motherly tenderness, and he began to regard himself as a woman. His speech and gestures changed. He began to move freely with the ladies of Mathur's family, who now looked upon him as one of their own sex. During this time he worshipped the Divine Mother as Her companion or handmaid.

In Communion with the Divine Beloved

Sri Ramakrishna now devoted himself to scaling the most inaccessible and dizzy heights of dualistic worship, namely, the complete union with Sri Krishna as the Beloved of the heart. He regarded himself as one of the gopis of Vrindavan, mad with longing for her divine Sweetheart. At his request Mathur provided him with woman's dress and jewellery. In this love pursuit, food and drink were forgotten. Day and night he wept bitterly. The yearning turned into a mad frenzy; for the divine Krishna began to play with him the old tricks He had played with the gopis. He would tease and taunt, now and then revealing Himself, but always keeping at a distance. Sri Ramakrishna's anguish brought on a return of the old physical symptoms: the burning sensation, an oozing of blood through the pores, a loosening of the joints, and the stopping of physiological functions.

The Vaishnava scriptures advise one to propitiate Radha and obtain her grace in order to realize Sri Krishna. So the tortured devotee now turned his prayer to her. Within a short time he enjoyed her blessed vision. He saw and felt the figure of Radha disappearing into his own body.

He said later on: “It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha. Her very appearance showed that she had completely forgotten herself in her passionate attachment to Krishna. Her complexion was a light yellow.”

Now one with Radha, he manifested the great ecstatic love, the Maha–bhava which had found in her its fullest expression. Later Sri Ramakrishna said: “The manifestation in the same individual of the nineteen different kinds of emotion for God is called, in the books on bhakti, Maha–bhava. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to express even a single one of these. But in this body [meaning himself] there has been a complete manifestation of all nineteen.”

The love of Radha is the precursor of the resplendent vision of Sri Krishna, and Sri Ramakrishna soon experienced that vision. The enchanting form of Krishna appeared to him and merged in his person. He became Krishna; he totally forgot his own individuality and the world; he saw Krishna in himself and in the universe. Thus he attained to the fulfilment of the worship of the Personal God. He drank from the fountain of Immortal Bliss. The agony of his heart vanished forever. He realized Amrita, Immortality, beyond the shadow of death.

One day, listening to a recitation of the Bhagavata on the verandah of the Radhakanta temple he fell into a divine mood and saw the enchanting form of Krishna. He perceived the luminous rays issuing from Krishna’s Lotus Feet in the form of a stout rope, which touched first the Bhagavata and then his own chest, connecting all three—God, the scripture, and the devotee. “After this vision,” he used to say, “I came to realize that *Bhagavan–Bhakta–and–Bhagavata*—God–Devotee—and—Scripture—are in reality, one and the same.”

Vedanta

The Brahmani was the enthusiastic teacher and astonished beholder of Sri Ramakrishna in his spiritual progress. She became proud of the achievements of her unique pupil. But the pupil himself was not permitted to rest; his destiny beckoned him forward. His Divine Mother would allow him no respite till he had left behind the entire realm of duality with its visions, experiences, and ecstatic dreams. But for the new ascent the old tender guides would not suffice. The Brahmani, on whom he had depended for three years saw her son escape from her to follow the command of a teacher with masculine strength, a sterner mien, a gnarled physique, and a virile voice. The new guru was a wandering monk, the sturdy Totapuri, whom Sri Ramakrishna learnt to address affectionately as *Nangta*, the “Naked One”, because of his total renunciation of all earthly objects and attachments, including even a piece of wearing-cloth.

Totapuri was the bearer of a philosophy new to Sri Ramakrishna, the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy, whose conclusions Totapuri had experienced in his own life. This ancient Hindu system designates the Ultimate Reality as Brahman, also described as *Satchidananda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Brahman is the only Real Existence. In It there is no time, no space, no causality, no multiplicity. But through Maya, Its inscrutable Power, time, space, and causality are created and the One appears to break into the many. The eternal Spirit appears as a manifold of individuals endowed with form and subject to the conditions of time. The Immortal becomes a victim of birth and death. The Changeless undergoes change. The sinless Pure Soul, hypnotised by Its own Maya, experiences the joys of heaven and the pains of hell. But these experiences based on the duality of the subject-object relationship are unreal. Even the vision of a Personal God is, ultimately speaking, as illusory as the experience of any other object. Man attains his liberation, therefore, by piercing the veil of Maya and rediscovering his total identity with Brahman. Knowing himself to be one with the Universal Spirit, he realizes ineffable Peace. Only then does he go beyond the fiction of birth and death; only then does he become immortal. And this is the ultimate goal of all religions —to dehypnotize the soul now hypnotized by its own ignorance.

The path of the Vedantic discipline is the path of negation, *"Neti"*, in which, by stern determination, all that is unreal is both negated and renounced. It is the path of jnana, knowledge, the direct method of realizing the Absolute. After the negation of everything relative, including the discriminating ego itself, the aspirant merges in the One without a Second, in the bliss of nirvikalpa Samadhi, where subject and object are alike dissolved. The soul goes beyond the realm of thought. The domain of duality is transcended. Maya is left behind with all its changes and modifications. The Real Man towers above the delusions of creation, preservation, and destruction. An avalanche of indescribable Bliss sweeps away all relative ideas of pain and pleasure, good and evil. There shines in the heart the glory of the Eternal Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Knower, knowledge, and known are dissolved in the Ocean of one eternal Consciousness; love, lover, and beloved merge in the unbounded Sea of supreme Felicity; birth, growth, and death vanish in infinite Existence. All doubts and misgivings are quelled for ever; the oscillations of the mind are stopped; the momentum of past actions is exhausted. Breaking down the ridge-pole of the tabernacle in which the soul has made its abode for untold ages, stilling the body, calming the mind, drowning the ego, the sweet joy of Brahman

wells up in that superconscious state. Space disappears into nothingness, time is swallowed in eternity, and causation becomes a dream of the past. Only Existence is. Ah! Who can describe what the soul then feels in its communion with the Self?

Even when man descends from this dizzy height, he is devoid of ideas of “I” and “mine”; he looks on the body as a mere shadow, an outer sheath encasing the soul. He does not dwell on the past, takes no thought for the future, and looks with indifference on the present. He surveys everything in the world with an eye of equality; he is no longer touched by the infinite variety of phenomena; he no longer reacts to pleasure and pain. He remains unmoved whether he—that is to say, his body—is worshipped by the good or tormented by the wicked; for he realizes that it is the one Brahman that manifests Itself through everything. The impact of such an experience devastates the body and mind. Consciousness becomes blasted, as it were, with an excess of Light. In the Vedanta books it is said that after the experience of nirvikalpa Samadhi the body drops off like a dry leaf. Only those who are born with a special mission for the world can return from this height to the valleys of normal life. They live and move in the world for the welfare of mankind. They are invested with a supreme spiritual power. A divine glory shines through them.

Totapuri

Totapuri arrived at the Dakshineswar temple garden toward the end of 1864. Perhaps born in the Punjab, he was the head of a monastery in that province of India and claimed leadership of seven hundred sannyasis. Trained from early youth in the disciplines of the Advaita Vedanta, he looked upon the world as an illusion. The gods and goddesses of the dualistic worship were to him mere fantasies of the deluded mind. Prayers, ceremonies, rites, and rituals had nothing to do with true religion, and about these he was utterly indifferent. Exercising self-exertion and unshakable will-power, he had liberated himself from attachment to the sense-objects of the relative universe. For forty years he had practised austere discipline on the bank of the sacred Narmada and had finally realized his identity with the Absolute. Thenceforward he roamed in the world as an unfettered soul, a lion free from the cage. Clad in a loin-cloth, he spent his days under the canopy of the sky alike in storm and sunshine, feeding his body on the slender pittance of alms. He had been visiting the estuary of the Ganges. On his return journey along the bank of the sacred river, led by the inscrutable Divine Will, he stopped at Dakshineswar.

Totapuri, discovering at once that Sri Ramakrishna was prepared to be a student of Vedanta, asked to initiate him into its mysteries. With the permission of the Divine Mother, Sri Ramakrishna agreed to the proposal. But Totapuri explained that only a sannyasi could receive the teaching of Vedanta. Sri Ramakrishna agreed to renounce the world, but with the stipulation that the ceremony of his initiation into the monastic order be performed in secret, to spare the feelings of his old mother, who had been living with him at Dakshineswar.

On the appointed day, in the small hours of the morning, a fire was lighted in the Panchavati. Totapuri and Sri Ramakrishna sat before it. The flame played on their faces. “Ramakrishna was a small brown man with a short beard and beautiful eyes, long dark eyes, full of light, obliquely set and slightly veiled, never very wide open, but seeing half-closed a great distance both outwardly and inwardly. His mouth was open over his white teeth in a bewitching smile, at once affectionate and mischievous. Of medium height, he was thin to emaciation and extremely delicate. His temperament was high-strung, for he was supersensitive to all the winds of joy and sorrow, both moral and physical. He was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror, turned both out and in.” Facing him, the other rose like a rock. He was very tall and robust, a sturdy and tough oak. His constitution and mind were of iron. He was the strong leader of men.

In the burning flame before him Sri Ramakrishna performed the rituals of destroying his attachment to relatives, friends, body, mind, sense-organs, ego, and the world. The leaping flame swallowed it all, making the initiate free and pure. The sacred thread and the tuft of hair were consigned to the fire, completing his severance from caste, sex, and society. Last of all he burnt in that fire, with all that is holy as his witness, his desire for enjoyment here and hereafter. He uttered the sacred mantras giving assurance of safety and fearlessness to all beings, who were only manifestations of his own Self. The rites completed, the disciple received from the guru the loincloth and ochre robe, the emblems of his new life.

The teacher and the disciple repaired to the meditation room near by. Totapuri began to impart to Sri Ramakrishna the great truths of Vedanta. “Brahman”, he said, “is the only Reality, ever pure, ever illumined, ever free, beyond the limits of time, space, and causation. Though apparently divided by names and forms through the inscrutable power of Maya, that enchantress who makes the impossible possible, Brahman is really One and undivided. When a seeker

merges in the beatitude of Samadhi, he does not perceive time and space or name and form, the offspring of Maya. Whatever is within the domain of Maya is unreal. Give it up. Destroy the prison-house of name and form and rush out of it with the strength of a lion. Dive deep in search of the Self and realize It through Samadhi. You will find the world of name and form vanishing into void, and the puny ego dissolving in Brahman-Consciousness. You will realize your identity with Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute." Quoting the Upanishad, Totapuri said "That knowledge is shallow by which one sees or hears or knows another. What is shallow is worthless and can never give real felicity. But the Knowledge by which one does not see another or hear another or know another, which is beyond duality, is great, and through such Knowledge one attains the Infinite Bliss. How can the mind and senses grasp That which shines in the heart of all as the Eternal Subject?"

Totapuri asked the disciple to withdraw his mind from all objects of relative world, including the gods and goddesses, and to concentrate on the Absolute. But the task was not easy even for Sri Ramakrishna. He found it impossible to take his mind beyond Kali, the Divine Mother of the Universe. "After the initiation", Sri Ramakrishna once said, describing the event, "Nangta began to teach me the various conclusions of the Advaita Vedanta and asked me to withdraw the mind completely from all objects and dive deep into the Atman. But in spite of all my attempts I could not altogether cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in taking the mind from all the objects of the world. But the radiant and too familiar figure of the Blissful Mother, the Embodiment of the essence of Pure Consciousness, appeared before me as a living reality. Her bewitching smile prevented me from passing into the Great Beyond. Again and again I tried, but She stood in my way every time. In despair I said to Nangta: 'It is hopeless. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and come face to face with Atman.' He grew excited and sharply said: 'What? You can't do it? But you have to.' He cast his eyes around. Finding a piece of glass he took it up and stuck it between my eyebrows. 'Concentrate the mind on this point!' he thundered. Then with stern determination I again sat to meditate. As soon as the gracious form of the Divine Mother appeared before me, I used my discrimination as a sword and with it clove Her in two. The last barrier fell. My spirit at once soared beyond the relative plane and I lost myself in Samadhi."

Sri Ramakrishna remained completely absorbed in Samadhi for three days. "Is it really true?" Totapuri cried out in astonishment. "Is it possible that he has

attained in a single day what it took me forty years of strenuous practice to achieve? Great God! It is nothing short of a miracle!" With the help of Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna's mind finally came down to the relative plane.

Totapuri, a monk of the most orthodox type, never stayed at a place more than three days. But he remained at Dakshineswar eleven months. He too had something to learn.

Totapuri had no idea of the struggles of ordinary men in the toils of passion and desire. Having maintained all through life the guilelessness of a child, he laughed at the idea of a man's being led astray by the senses. He was convinced that the world, was Maya and had only to be denounced to vanish for ever. A born non-dualist, he had no faith in a Personal God. He did not believe in the terrible aspect of Kali, much less in Her benign aspect. Music and the chanting of God's holy name were to him only so much nonsense. He ridiculed the spending of emotion on the worship of a Personal God.

Totapuri's Lesson

From Sri Ramakrishna Totapuri had to learn the significance of Kali, the Great Fact of the relative world, and of Maya, Her indescribable Power.

One day, when guru and disciple were engaged in an animated discussion about Vedanta, a servant of the temple garden came there and took a coal from the sacred fire that had been lighted by the great ascetic. He wanted it to light his tobacco. Totapuri flew into a rage and was about to beat the man. Sri Ramakrishna rocked with laughter. "What a shame!" he cried. "You are explaining to me the reality of Brahman and the illusoriness of the world; yet now you have so far forgotten yourself as to be about to beat a man in a fit of passion. The power of Maya is indeed inscrutable!" Totapuri was embarrassed.

About this time Totapuri was suddenly laid up with a severe attack of dysentery. On account of this miserable illness he found it impossible to meditate. One night the pain became excruciating. He could no longer concentrate on Brahman. The body stood in the way. He became incensed with its demands. A free soul, he did not at all care for the body. So he determined to drown it in the Ganges. Thereupon he walked into the river. But, lo! He walks to the other bank. Is there not enough water in the Ganges? Standing dumbfounded on the other bank he looks back across the water. The trees, the temples, the houses, are silhouetted against the sky. Suddenly, in one dazzling moment, he sees on all sides the presence of the Divine Mother. She is in everything; She is everything. She is in the water; She is on land. She is the body; She is the mind. She is pain; She is comfort. She is knowledge; She is ignorance. She is life; She

is death. She is everything that one sees, hears, or imagines. She turns “yea” into “nay”, and “nay” into “yea”. Without Her grace no embodied being can go beyond Her realm. Man has no free will. He is not even free to die. Yet, again, beyond the body and mind She resides in Her Transcendental Absolute aspect. She is the Brahman that Totapuri had been worshipping all his life.

Totapuri returned to Dakshineswar and spent the remaining hours of the night meditating on the Divine Mother. In the morning he went to the Kali temple with Sri Ramakrishna and prostrated himself before the image of the Mother. He now realized why he had spent eleven months at Dakshineswar. Bidding farewell to the disciple, he continued on his way, enlightened.

Sri Ramakrishna later described the significance of Totapuri’s lessons: “When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive—neither creating nor preserving nor destroying—, I call Him Brahman or *Purusha,* the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active—creating, preserving, and destroying—, I call Him Shakti or Maya or *Prakriti,* the Personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same thing, like milk and its whiteness, the diamond and its lustre, the snake and its wriggling motion. It is impossible to conceive of the one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one.”

After the departure of Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna remained for six months in a state of absolute identity with Brahman. “For six months at a stretch”, he said, “I remained in that state from which ordinary men can never return; generally the body falls off, after three weeks, like a sere leaf. I was not conscious of day and night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body’s, but I did not feel them. My hair became matted with dust.”

His body would not have survived but for the kindly attention of a monk who happened to be at Dakshineswar at that time and who somehow realized that for the good of humanity Sri Ramakrishna’s body must be preserved. He tried various means, even physical violence, to recall the fleeing soul to the prison-house of the body, and during the resultant fleeting moments of consciousness he would push a few morsels of food down Sri Ramakrishna’s throat. Presently Sri Ramakrishna received the command of the Divine Mother to remain on the threshold of relative consciousness. Soon thereafter he was afflicted with a serious attack of dysentery. Day and night the pain tortured him, and his mind gradually came down to the physical plane.

Islam

Toward the end of 1866 he began to practise the disciplines of Islam. Under

the direction of his Mussalman guru he abandoned himself to his new sadhana. He dressed as a Mussalman and repeated the name of Allah.

His prayers took the form of the Islamic devotions. He forgot the Hindu gods and goddesses—even Kali—and gave up visiting the temples. He took up his residence outside the temple precincts. After three days he saw the vision of a radiant figure, perhaps Mohammed. This figure gently approached him and finally lost himself in Sri Ramakrishna. Thus he realized the Mussalman God. Thence he passed into communion with Brahman. The mighty river of Islam also led him back to the Ocean of the Absolute.

Christianity

Eight years later, some time in November 1874, Sri Ramakrishna was seized with an irresistible desire to learn the truth of the Christian religion. He began to listen to readings from the Bible, by Shambhu Charan Mallick, a gentleman of Calcutta and a devotee of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna became fascinated by the life and teachings of Jesus. One day he was seated in the parlour of Jadu Mallick's garden house at Dakshineswar, when his eyes became fixed on a painting of the Madonna and Child. Intently watching it, he became gradually overwhelmed with divine emotion. The figures in the picture took on life, and the rays of light emanating from them entered his soul. The effect of this experience was stronger than that of the vision of Mohammed. In dismay he cried out, "O Mother! What are You doing to me?" And breaking through the barriers of creed and religion, he entered a new realm of ecstasy. Christ possessed his soul. For three days he did not set foot in the Kali temple. On the fourth day, in the afternoon, as he was walking in the Panchavati, he saw coming toward him a person with beautiful large eyes, serene countenance, and fair skin. As the two faced each other, a voice rang out in the depths of Sri Ramakrishna's soul: "Behold the Christ who shed His heart's blood for the redemption of the world, who suffered a sea of anguish for love of men. It is He, the Master Yogi, who is in eternal union with God. It is Jesus, Love Incarnate." The Son of Man embraced the Son of the Divine Mother and merged in him. Sri Ramakrishna realized his identity with Christ, as he had already realized his identity with Kali, Rama, Hanuman, Radha, Krishna, Brahman, and Mohammed. The Master went into Samadhi and communed with the Brahman with attributes. Thus he experienced the truth that Christianity, too, was a path leading to God-Consciousness. Till the last moment of his life he believed that Christ was an Incarnation of God. But Christ, for him, was not the only Incarnation; there were others—Buddha, for instance, and Krishna.

Attitude towards Different Religions

Sri Ramakrishna accepted the divinity of Buddha and used to point out the similarity of his teachings to those of the Upanishads. He also showed great respect for the Tirthankaras, who founded Jainism, and for the ten Gurus of Sikhism. But he did not speak of them as Divine Incarnations. He was heard to say that the Gurus of Sikhism were the reincarnations of King Janaka of ancient India. He kept in his room at Dakshineswar a small statue of Tirthankara Mahavira and a picture of Christ, before which incense was burnt morning and evening.

Without being formally initiated into their doctrines, Sri Ramakrishna thus realized the ideals of religions other than Hinduism. He did not need to follow any doctrine. All barriers were removed by his overwhelming love of God. So he became a Master who could speak with authority regarding the ideas and ideals of the various religions of the world. "I have practised", said he, "all religions—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity—and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look, I see men quarrelling in the name of religion— Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas, and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Shiva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well —the same Being with a thousand names. A lake has several ghats. At one, the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it '*Jal*'; at another the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it '*pani*'. At a third the Christians call it '*water*'. Can we imagine that it is not 'jal', but only 'pani' or 'water'? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him."

In 1867, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Kamarpukur to recuperate from the effect of his austerities. The peaceful countryside, the simple and artless companions of his boyhood, and the pure air did him much good. The villagers were happy to get back their playful, frank, witty, kind-hearted, and truthful Gadadhar, though they did not fail to notice the great change that had come over him during his years in Calcutta. His wife, Sarada Devi, now fourteen years old, soon arrived at Kamarpukur. Her spiritual development was much beyond her age and she was able to understand immediately her husband's state of mind.

She became eager to learn from him about God and to live with him as his attendant. The Master accepted her cheerfully both as his disciple and as his spiritual companion. Referring to the experiences of these few days, she once said: “I used to feel always as if a pitcher full of bliss were placed in my heart. The joy was indescribable.”

Pilgrimage

On January 27, 1868, Mathur Babu with a party of some one hundred and twenty-five persons set out on a pilgrimage to the sacred places of northern India. At Vaidyanath in Behar, when the Master saw the inhabitants of a village reduced by poverty and starvation to mere skeletons, he requested his rich patron to feed the people and give each a piece of cloth. Mathur demurred at the added expense. The Master declared bitterly that he would not go on to Banaras, but would live with the poor and share their miseries. He actually left Mathur and sat down with the villagers.

Whereupon Mathur had to yield. On another occasion, two years later, Sri Ramakrishna showed a similar sentiment for the poor and needy. He accompanied Mathur on a tour to one of the latter’s estates at the time of the collection of rents. For two years the harvests had failed and the tenants were in a state of extreme poverty. The Master asked Mathur to remit their rents, distribute help to them, and in addition give the hungry people a sumptuous feast. When Mathur grumbled, the Master said: “You are only the steward of the Divine Mother. They are the Mother’s tenants. You must spend the Mother’s money. When they are suffering, how can you refuse to help them? You must help them.” Again Mathur had to give in. Sri Ramakrishna’s sympathy for the poor sprang from his perception of God in all created beings. His sentiment was not that of the humanist or philanthropist. To him the service of man was the same as the worship of God.

The party entered holy Banaras by boat along the Ganges. When Sri Ramakrishna’s eyes fell on this city of Shiva, where had accumulated for ages the devotion and piety of countless worshippers, he saw it to be made of gold, as the scriptures declare. He was visibly moved. During his stay in the city he treated every particle of its earth with utmost respect. At the Manikarnika Ghat, the great cremation ground of the city, he actually saw Shiva, with ash-covered body and tawny matted hair, serenely approaching each funeral pyre and breathing into the ears of the corpses the mantra of liberation; and then the Divine Mother removing from the dead their bonds. Thus he realized the significance of the scriptural statement that anyone dying in Banaras attains

salvation through the grace of Shiva. He paid a visit to Trailanga Swami, the celebrated monk, whom he later declared to be a real Paramahansa, a veritable image of Shiva.

Sri Ramakrishna visited Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna, and then proceeded to Vrindavan and Mathura, hallowed by the legends, songs, and dramas about Krishna and the gopis. Here he had numerous visions and his heart overflowed with divine emotion. He wept and said: “O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent.” He visited the great woman saint Gangamayi, regarded by Vaishnava devotees as the reincarnation of an intimate attendant of Radha. She was sixty years old and had frequent trances. She spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as an incarnation of Radha. With great difficulty he was persuaded to leave her.

On the return journey Mathur wanted to visit Gaya, but Sri Ramakrishna declined to go. He recalled his father’s vision at Gaya before his own birth and felt that in the temple of Vishnu he would become permanently absorbed in God. Mathur, honouring the Master’s wish, returned with his party to Calcutta.

From Vrindavan the Master had brought a handful of dust. Part of this he scattered in the Panchavati; the rest he buried in the little hut where he had practised meditation. “Now this place”, he said, “is as sacred as Vrindavan.”

In 1870 the Master went on a pilgrimage to Nadia, the birth-place of Sri Chaitanya. As the boat by which he travelled approached the sand-bank close to Nadia, Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of the “two brothers”, Sri Chaitanya and his companion Nityananda, “bright as molten gold” and with haloes, rushing to greet him with uplifted hands. “There they come! There they come!” he cried. They entered his body and he went into a deep trance.

Relation with His Wife

In 1872, Sarada Devi paid her first visit to her husband at Dakshineswar. Four years earlier she had seen him at Kamarpukur and had tasted the bliss of his divine company. Since then she had become even more gentle, tender, introspective, serious, and unselfish. She had heard many rumours about her husband’s insanity. People had shown her pity in her misfortune. The more she thought, the more she felt that her duty was to be with him, giving him, in whatever measure she could, a wife’s devoted service. She was now eighteen years old. Accompanied by her father, she arrived at Dakshineswar, having come on foot the distance of eighty miles. She had had an attack of fever on the way. When she arrived at the temple garden the Master said sorrowfully: “Ah! You have come too late. My Mathur is no longer here to look after you.” Mathur had

passed away the previous year.

The Master took up the duty of instructing his young wife, and this included everything from housekeeping to the Knowledge of Brahman. He taught her how to trim a lamp, how to behave toward people according to their differing temperaments, and how to conduct herself before visitors. He instructed her in the mysteries of spiritual life—prayer, meditation, japa, deep contemplation, and Samadhi. The first lesson that Sarada Devi received was: “God is everybody’s Beloved, just as the moon is dear to every child. Everyone has the same right to pray to Him. Out of His grace He reveals Himself to all who call upon Him. You too will see Him if you but pray to Him.”

Totapuri, coming to know of the Master’s marriage, had once remarked: “What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the Knowledge of Brahman who can adhere to his spirit of discrimination and renunciation even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look on man and woman alike as Brahman. A man with the idea of sex may be a good aspirant, but he is still far from the goal.” Sri Ramakrishna and his wife lived together at Dakshineswar, but their minds always soared above the worldly plane. A few months after Sarada Devi’s arrival Sri Ramakrishna arranged, on an auspicious day, a special worship of Kali, the Divine Mother. Instead of an image of the Deity, he placed on the seat the living image, Sarada Devi herself. The worshipper and the worshipped went into deep Samadhi and in the transcendental plane their souls were united. After several hours Sri Ramakrishna came down again to the relative plane, sang a hymn to the Great Goddess, and surrendered, at the feet of the living image, himself, his rosary, and the fruit of his life-long sadhana. This is known in Tantra as the *Shodasi Puja*, the “Adoration of Woman”. Sri Ramakrishna realized the significance of the great statement of the Upanishad: “O Lord, Thou art the woman, Thou art the man; Thou art the boy, Thou art the girl; Thou art the old, tottering on their crutches. Thou pervadest the universe in its multiple forms.”

By his marriage Sri Ramakrishna admitted the great value of marriage in man’s spiritual evolution, and by adhering to his monastic vows he demonstrated the imperative necessity of self-control, purity, and continence, in the realization of God. By his unique spiritual relationship with his wife he proved that husband and wife can live together as spiritual companions. Thus his life is a synthesis of the ways of life of the householder and the monk.

The “Ego” of the Master

In the nirvikalpa Samadhi Sri Ramakrishna had realized that Brahman alone is

real and the world illusory. By keeping his mind six months on the plane of the non-dual Brahman, he had attained to the state of the *Vijnani*, the Knower of Truth in a special and very rich sense, who sees Brahman not only in himself and in the transcendental Absolute, but in everything of the world. In this state of *Vijnana*, sometimes, bereft of body-consciousness, he would regard himself as one with Brahman; sometimes, conscious of the dual world, he would regard himself as God's devotee, servant, or child. In order to enable the Master to work for the welfare of humanity, the Divine Mother had kept in him a trace of ego, which he described —according to his mood—as the "ego of Knowledge", the "ego of Devotion", the "ego of a child", or the "ego of a servant". In any case this ego of the Master, consumed by the fire of the Knowledge of Brahman, was an appearance only, like a burnt string. He often referred to this ego as the "ripe ego" in contrast with the ego of the bound soul, which he described as the "unripe" or "green" ego. The ego of the bound soul identifies itself with the body, relatives, possessions, and the world; but the "ripe ego", illumined by Divine Knowledge, knows the body, relatives, possessions, and the world to be unreal and establishes a relationship of love with God alone. Through this "ripe ego" Sri Ramakrishna dealt with the world and his wife. One day, while stroking his feet, Sarada Devi asked the Master, "What do you think of me?" Quick came the answer: "The Mother who is worshipped in the temple is the mother who has given birth to my body and is now living in the Nahabat, and it is She again who is stroking my feet at this moment. Indeed, I always look on you as the personification of the Blissful Mother Kali."

Sarada Devi, in the company of her husband, had rare spiritual experiences. She said: "I have no words to describe my wonderful exaltation of spirit as I watched him in his different moods. Under the influence of divine emotion he would sometimes talk on abstruse subjects, sometimes laugh, sometimes weep, and sometimes become perfectly motionless in Samadhi. This would continue throughout the night. There was such an extraordinary divine presence in him that now and then I would shake with fear and wonder how the night would pass. Months went by in this way. Then one day he discovered that I had to keep awake the whole night lest, during my sleep, he should go into Samadhi—for it might happen at any moment—, and so he asked me to sleep in the Nahabat."

Summary of the Master's Spiritual Experiences

We have now come to the end of Sri Ramakrishna's sadhana, the period of his spiritual discipline. As a result of his supersensuous experiences he reached certain conclusions regarding himself and spirituality in general. His conclusions

about himself may be summarised as follows:

First, he was an Incarnation of God, a specially commissioned person, whose spiritual experiences were for the benefit of humanity. Whereas it takes an ordinary man a whole life's struggle to realize one or two phases of God, he had in a few years realized God in all His phases.

Second, he knew that he had always been a free soul, that the various disciplines through which he had passed were really not necessary for his own liberation but were solely for the benefit of others. Thus the terms liberation and bondage were not applicable to him. As long as there are beings who consider themselves bound, God must come down to earth as an Incarnation to free them from bondage, just as a magistrate must visit any part of his district in which there is trouble.

Third, he came to foresee the time of his death. His words with respect to this matter were literally fulfilled.

About spirituality in general the following were his conclusions :

First, he was firmly convinced that all religions are true, that every doctrinal system represents a path to God. He had followed all the main paths and all had led him to the same goal. He was the first religious prophet recorded in history to preach the harmony of religions.

Second, the three great systems of thought known as Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Absolute Non-dualism—*Dvaita, Visishtadvaita, and Advaita* - he perceived to represent three stages in man's progress toward the Ultimate Reality. They were not contradictory but complementary and suited to different temperaments. For the ordinary man with strong attachment to the senses, a dualistic form of religion, prescribing a certain amount of material support, such as music and other symbols, is useful. A man of God-realization transcends the idea of worldly duties, but the ordinary mortal must perform his duties, striving to be unattached and to surrender the results to God. The mind can comprehend and describe the range of thought and experience up to the Visishtadvaita, and no further. The Advaita, the last word in spiritual experience, is something to be felt in Samadhi, for it transcends mind and speech. From the highest standpoint, the Absolute and Its manifestation are equally real—the Lord's Name, His Abode, and the Lord Himself are of the same spiritual Essence. Everything is Spirit, the difference being only in form.

Third, Sri Ramakrishna realized the wish of the Divine Mother that through him She should found a new Order, consisting of those who would uphold the universal doctrines illustrated in his life.

Fourth, his spiritual insight told him that those who were having their last birth on the mortal plane of existence and those who had sincerely called on the Lord even once in their lives must come to him.

During this period Sri Ramakrishna suffered several bereavements. The first was the death of a nephew named, Akshay. After the young man's death Sri Ramakrishna said: "Akshay died before my very eyes. But it did not affect me in the least. I stood by and watched a man die. It was like a sword being drawn from its scabbard. I enjoyed the scene, and laughed and sang and danced over it. They removed the body and cremated it. But the next day as I stood there (pointing to the southeast verandah of his room), I felt a racking pain for the loss of Akshay, as if somebody were squeezing my heart like a wet towel. I wondered at it and thought that the Mother was teaching me a lesson. I was not much concerned even with my own body—much less with a relative. But if such was my pain at the loss of a nephew, how much more must be the grief of the householders at the loss of their near and dear ones!" In 1871 Mathur died, and some five years later Shambhu Mallick—who, after Mathur's passing away, had taken care of the Master's comfort. In 1873 died his elder brother Rameswar, and in 1876, his beloved mother. These bereavements left their imprint on the tender human heart of Sri Ramakrishna albeit he had realized the immortality of the soul and the illusoriness of birth and death.

In March 1875, about a year before the death of his mother, the Master met Keshab Chandra Sen. The meeting was a momentous event for both Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab. Here the Master for the first time came into actual contact with a worthy representative of modern India.

Brahmo Samaj

Keshab was the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, one of the two great movements that, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, played an important part in shaping the course of the renascence of India. The founder of the Brahmo movement had been the great Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833). Though born in an orthodox brahmin family, Rammohan Roy had shown great sympathy for Islam and Christianity. He had gone to Tibet in search of the Buddhist mysteries. He had extracted from Christianity its ethical system, but had rejected the divinity of Christ as he had denied the Hindu Incarnations. The religion of Islam influenced him, to a great extent, in the formulation of his monotheistic doctrines. But he always went back to the Vedas for his spiritual inspiration. The Brahmo Samaj, which he founded in 1828, was dedicated to the "worship and adoration of the Eternal, the Unsearchable, the Immutable Being, who is the

Author and Preserver of the Universe". The Samaj was open to all without distinction of colour, creed, caste, nation, or religion.

The real organizer of the Samaj was Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905), the father of the poet Rabindranath. His physical and spiritual beauty, aristocratic aloofness, penetrating intellect, and poetic sensibility made him the foremost leader of the educated Bengalis. These addressed him by the respectful epithet of *Maharshi,* the "Great Seer". The Maharshi was a Sanskrit scholar and, unlike Raja Rammohan Roy, drew his inspiration entirely from the Upanishads. He was an implacable enemy of image worship and also fought to stop the infiltration of Christian ideas into the Samaj. He gave the movement its faith and ritual. Under his influence the Brahmo Samaj professed One Self-existent Supreme Being who had created the universe out of nothing, the God of Truth, Infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Power, the Eternal and Omnipotent, the One without a Second. Man should love Him and do His will, believe in Him and worship Him, and thus merit salvation in the world to come.

By far the ablest leader of the Brahmo movement was Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884). Unlike Raja Rammohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore, Keshab was born of a middle-class Bengali family and had been brought up in an English school. He did not know Sanskrit and very soon broke away from the popular Hindu religion. Even at an early age he came under the spell of Christ and professed to have experienced the special favour of John the Baptist, Christ, and St. Paul. When he strove to introduce Christ to the Brahmo Samaj, a rupture became inevitable with Devendranath. In 1868 Keshab broke with the older leader and founded the Brahmo Samaj of India, Devendra retaining leadership of the first Brahmo Samaj, now called the Adi Samaj.

Keshab possessed a complex nature. When passing through a great moral crisis, he spent much of his time in solitude and felt that he heard the voice of God. When a devotional form of worship was introduced into the Brahmo Samaj, he spent hours in singing kirtan with his followers. He visited England in 1870 and impressed the English people with his musical voice, his simple English, and his spiritual fervour. He was entertained by Queen Victoria. Returning to India, he founded centres of the Brahmo Samaj in various parts of the country. Not unlike a professor of comparative religion in a European university, he began to discover, about the time of his first contact with Sri Ramakrishna, the harmony of religions. He became sympathetic toward the Hindu gods and goddesses, explaining them in a liberal fashion. Further, he believed that he was called by God to dictate to the world God's newly revealed law, the New Dispensation, the Nava-vidhan.

In 1878 a schism divided Keshab's Samaj. Some of his influential followers

accused him of infringing the Brahmo principles by marrying his daughter to a wealthy man before she had attained the marriageable age approved by the Samaj. This group seceded and established the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Keshab remaining the leader of the Navavidhan. Keshab now began to be drawn more and more toward the Christ ideal, though under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna his devotion to the Divine Mother also deepened. His mental oscillation between Christ and the Divine Mother of Hinduism found no position of rest. In Bengal and some other parts of India the Brahmo movement took the form of Unitarian Christianity, scoffed at Hindu rituals, and preached a crusade against image worship. Influenced by Western culture, it declared the supremacy of reason, advocated the ideals of the French Revolution, abolished the caste-system among, its own members, stood for the emancipation of women, agitate for the abolition of early marriage, sanctioned the remarriage of widows, and encouraged various educational and social-reform movements. The immediate effect of the Brahmo movement in Bengal was the checking of the proselytising activities of the Christian missionaries. It also raised Indian culture in the estimation of its English masters. But it was an intellectual and eclectic religious ferment born of the necessity of the time. Unlike Hinduism, it was not founded on the deep inner experiences of sages and prophets. Its influence was confined to a comparatively few educated men and women of the country, and the vast masses of the Hindus remained outside it. It sounded monotonously only one of the notes in the rich gamut of the Eternal Religion of the Hindus.

Arya Samaj

The other movement playing an important part in the nineteenth-century religious revival of India was the Arya Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj, essentially a movement of compromise with European culture, tacitly admitted the superiority of the West. But the founder of the Arya Samaj was a pugnacious Hindu sannyasi who accepted the challenge of Islam and Christianity and was resolved to combat all foreign influence in India. Swami Dayananda (1824-1883) launched this movement in Bombay in 1875, and soon its influence was felt throughout western India. The Swami was a great scholar of the Vedas, which he explained as being strictly mono-theistic. He preached against the worship of images and re-established the ancient Vedic sacrificial rites. According to him the Vedas were the ultimate authority on religion, and he accepted every word of them as literally true. The Arya Samaj became a bulwark against the encroachments of Islam and Christianity, and its orthodox flavour appealed to many Hindu minds. It also assumed leadership in many movements of social

reform. The caste-system became a target of its attack. It liberated women from many of their social disabilities. The cause of education received from it a great impetus. It started agitation against early marriage and advocated the remarriage of Hindu widows. Its influence was strongest in the Punjab, the battle-ground of the Hindu and Islamic cultures. A new fighting attitude was introduced into the slumbering Hindu society. Unlike the Brahmo Samaj, the influence of the Arya Samaj was not confined to the intellectuals. It was a force that spread to the masses. It was a dogmatic movement intolerant of those disagreed with its views, and it emphasized only one way, the Arya Samaj way, to the realization of Truth. Sri Ramakrishna met Swami Dayananda when the latter visited Bengal.

Keshab Chandra Sen

Keshab Chandra Sen and Sri Ramakrishna met for the first time in the garden house of Jaygopal Sen at Belgharia, a few miles from Dakshineswar, where the great Brahmo leader was staying with some of his disciples. In many respects the two were poles apart, though an irresistible inner attraction was to make them intimate friends. The Master had realized God as Pure Spirit and Consciousness, but he believed in the various forms of God as well. Keshab, on the other hand, regarded image worship as idolatry and gave allegorical explanations of the Hindu deities. Keshab was an orator and a writer of books and magazine articles; Sri Ramakrishna had a horror of lecturing and hardly knew how to write his own name. Keshab's fame spread far and wide, even reaching the distant shores of England; the Master still led a secluded life in the village of Dakshineswar. Keshab emphasized social reforms for India's regeneration; to Sri Ramakrishna God-realization was the only goal of life. Keshab considered himself a disciple of Christ and accepted in a diluted form the Christian sacraments and Trinity; Sri Ramakrishna was the simple child of Kali, the Divine Mother, though he too, in a different way, acknowledged Christ's divinity. Keshab was a house-holder and took a real interest in the welfare of his children, whereas Sri Ramakrishna was a Paramahansa and completely indifferent to the life of the world. Yet, as their acquaintance ripened into friendship, Sri Ramakrishna and Keshab held each other in great love and respect. Years later, at the news of Keshab's death, the Master felt as if half his body had become paralysed. Keshab's concepts of the harmony of religions and the Motherhood of God were deepened and enriched by his contact with Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna, dressed in a red-bordered dhoti, one end of which was carelessly thrown over his left shoulder, came to Jaygopal's garden house accompanied by Hriday. No one took notice of the unostentatious visitor. Finally

the Master said to Keshab, “People tell me you have seen God; so I have come to hear from you about God.” A magnificent conversation followed. The Master sang a thrilling song about Kali and forthwith went into Samadhi. When Hriday uttered the sacred “Om” in his ears, he gradually came back to consciousness of the world, his face still radiating a divine brilliance. Keshab and his followers were amazed. The contrast between Sri Ramakrishna and the Brahmo devotees was very interesting. There sat this small man, thin and extremely delicate. His eyes were illumined with an inner light. Good humour gleamed in his eyes and lurked in the corners of his mouth. His speech was Bengali of a homely kind with a slight, delightful stammer, and his words held men enthralled by their wealth of spiritual experience, their inexhaustible store of simile and metaphor, their power of observation, their bright and subtle humour, their wonderful catholicity, their ceaseless flow of wisdom. And around him now were the sophisticated men of Bengal, the best products of Western education, with Keshab, the idol of young Bengal, as their leader.

Keshab’s sincerity was enough for Sri Ramakrishna. Henceforth the two saw each other frequently, either at Dakshineswar or at the temple of the Brahmo Samaj. Whenever the Master was in the temple at the time of divine service, Keshab would request him to speak to the congregation. And Keshab would visit the saint, in his turn, with offerings of flowers and fruits.

The Master’s Yearning for His Own Devotees

Contact with the Brahmos increased Sri Ramakrishna’s longing to encounter aspirants who would be able to follow his teachings in their purest form. “There was no limit”, he once declared, “to the longing I felt at that time. During the day-time I somehow managed to control it. The secular talk of the worldly-minded was galling to me, and I would look wistfully to the day when my own beloved companions would come. I hoped to find solace in conversing with them and relating to them my own realizations. Every little incident would remind me of them, and thoughts of them wholly engrossed me. I was already arranging in my mind what I should say to one and give to another, and so on. But when the day would come to a close I would not be able to curb my feelings. The thought that another day had gone by, and they had not come, oppressed me. When, during the evening service, the temples rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells, I would climb to the roof of the *Kuthi* in the garden and, writhing in anguish of heart, cry at the top of my voice: ‘Come, my children! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you.’ A mother never longed so intensely for the sight of her child, nor a friend for his companions, nor a lover for his

sweetheart, as I longed for them. Oh, it was indescribable! Shortly after this period of yearning the devotees began to come."

In the year 1879 occasional writings about Sri Ramakrishna by the Brahmos, in the Brahmo magazines, began to attract his future disciples from the educated middle-class Bengalis, and they continued to come till 1884. But others, too, came, feeling the subtle power of his attraction. They were an ever shifting crowd of people of all castes and creeds: Hindus and Brahmos, Vaishnavas and Shaktas, the educated with university degrees and the illiterate, old and young, maharajas and beggars, journalists and artists, pundits and devotees, philosophers and the worldly-minded, jnanis and yogis, men of action and men of faith, virtuous women and prostitutes, office-holders and vagabonds, philanthropists and self-seekers, dramatists and drunkards, builders-up and pullers-down. He gave to them all, without stint, from his illimitable store of realization. No one went away empty-handed. He taught them the lofty knowledge of the Vedanta and the soul-melting love of the Purana. Twenty hours out of twenty-four he would speak without rest or respite. He gave to all his sympathy and enlightenment, and he touched them with that strange power of the soul which could not but melt even the most hardened. And people understood him according to their powers of comprehension.

House Holder Devotees

For the householders Sri Ramakrishna did not prescribe the hard path of total renunciation. He wanted them to discharge their obligations to their families. Their renunciation was to be mental. Spiritual life could not he acquired by flying away from responsibilities. A married couple should live like brother and sister after the birth of one or two children, devoting their time to spiritual talk and contemplation. He encouraged the householders, saying that their life was, in a way, easier than that of the monk, since it was more advantageous to fight the enemy from inside a fortress than in an open field. He insisted, however, on their repairing into solitude every now and then to strengthen their devotion and faith in God through prayer, japa, and meditation. He prescribed for them the companionship of *sadhus*. He asked them to perform their worldly duties with one hand, while holding to God with the other, and to pray to God to make their duties fewer and fewer so that in the end they might cling to Him with both hands. He would discourage in both the householders and the celibate youths any lukewarmness in their spiritual struggles. He would not ask them to follow indiscriminately the ideal of non-resistance, which ultimately makes a coward of the unwary.

Future Monks

But to the young men destined to be monks he pointed out the steep path of renunciation, both external and internal. They must take the vow of absolute continence and eschew all thought of greed and lust. By the practice of continence, aspirants develop a subtle nerve through which they understand the deeper mysteries of God. For them self-control is final, imperative, and absolute. The sannyasis are teachers of men, and their lives should be totally free from blemish. They must not even look at a picture which may awaken their animal passions. The Master selected his future monks from young men untouched by "woman and gold" and plastic enough to be cast in his spiritual mould. When teaching them the path of renunciation and discrimination, he would not allow the householders to be any where near them.

Ram and Manomohan

The first two householder devotees to come to Dakshineswar were Ram Chandra Dutta and Manomohan Mitra. A medical practitioner and chemist, Ram was sceptical about God and religion and never enjoyed peace of soul. He wanted tangible proof of God's existence. The Master said to him: "God really exists. You don't see the stars in the day-time, but that doesn't mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in milk. But can anybody see it by merely looking at the milk? To get butter you must churn milk in a quiet and cool place. You cannot realize God by a mere wish; you must go through some mental disciplines." By degrees the Master awakened Ram's spirituality and the latter became one of his foremost lay disciples. It was Ram who introduced Narendranath to Sri Ramakrishna. Narendra was a relative of Ram.

Manomohan at first met with considerable opposition from his wife and other relatives, who resented his visits to Dakshineswar. But in the end the unselfish love of the Master triumphed over worldly affection. It was Manomohan who brought Rakhal to the Master.

Surendra

Suresh Mitra, a beloved disciple whom the Master often addressed as Surendra, had received an English education and held an important post in an English firm. Like many other educated young men of the time, he prided himself on his atheism and led a Bohemian life. He was addicted to drinking. He cherished an exaggerated notion about man's free will. A victim of mental

depression, he was brought to Sri Ramakrishna by Ramchandra Dutta. When he heard the Master asking a disciple to practise the virtue of self-surrender to God, he was impressed. But though he tried thenceforth to do so, he was unable to give up his old associates and his drinking. One day the Master said in his presence, “Well, when a man goes to an undesirable place, why doesn’t he take the Divine Mother with him?” And to Surendra himself Sri Ramakrishna said: “Why should you drink wine as wine? Offer it to Kali, and then take it as Her *Prasad,* as consecrated drink. But see that you don’t, become intoxicated; you must not reel and your thoughts must not wander. At first you will feel ordinary excitement, but soon you will experience spiritual exaltation.” Gradually Surendra’s entire life was changed. The Master designated him as one of those commissioned by the Divine Mother to defray a great part of his expenses. Surendra’s purse was always open for the Master’s comfort.

Kedar

Kedarnath Chatterji was endowed with a spiritual temperament and had tried various paths of religion, some not very commendable. When he met the Master at Dakshineswar he understood the true meaning of religion. It is said that the Master, weary of instructing devotees who were coming to him in great numbers for guidance, once prayed to the Goddess Kali: “Mother, I am tired of speaking to people. Please give power to Kedar, Girish, Ram, Vijay, and Mahendra to give them the preliminary instruction, so that just a little teaching from me will be enough.” He was aware, however, of Kedar’s lingering attachment to worldly things and often warned him about it.

Harish

Harish, a young man in affluent circumstances, renounced his family and took shelter with the Master, who loved him for his sincerity, singleness of purpose, and quiet nature. He spent his leisure time in prayer and meditation, turning a deaf ear to the entreaties and threats of his relatives. Referring to his undisturbed peace of mind, the Master would say: “Real men are dead to the world though, living. Look at Harish. He is an example.” When one day the Master asked him to be a little kind to his wife, Harish said: “You must excuse me on this point. This is not the place to show kindness. If I try to be sympathetic to her, there is a possibility of my forgetting the ideal and becoming entangled in the world.”

Bhavanath

Bhavanath Chatterji visited the Master while he was still in his teens. His parents and relatives regarded Sri Ramakrishna as an insane person and tried their utmost to prevent him from becoming intimate with the Master. But the young boy was very stubborn and often spent nights at Dakshineswar. He was greatly attached to Narendra, and the Master encouraged their friendship. The very sight of him often awakened Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual emotion.

Balaram Bose

Balaram Bose came of a wealthy Vaishnava family. From his youth he had shown a deep religious temperament and had devoted his time to meditation, prayer, and the study of the Vaishnava scriptures. He was very much impressed by Sri Ramakrishna even at their first meeting. He asked Sri Ramakrishna whether God really existed and, if so, whether a man could realize Him. The Master said: "God reveals Himself to the devotee who thinks of Him as his nearest and dearest. Because you do not draw response by praying to Him once, you must not conclude that He does not exist. Pray to God, thinking of Him as dearer than your very self. He is much attached to His devotees. He comes to a man even before He is sought. There is none more intimate and affectionate than God." Balaram had never before heard God spoken of in such forceful words; every one of the words seemed true to him. Under the Master's influence he outgrew the conventions of the Vaishnava worship and became one of the most beloved of the disciples. It was at his home that the Master slept whenever he spent a night in Calcutta.

Mahendra or M.

Mahendranath Gupta, known as "M.", arrived at Dakshineswar in February 1882. He belonged to the Brahmo Samaj and was headmaster of the Vidyasagar High School at Shyambazar, Calcutta. At the very first sight the Master recognized him as one of his "marked" disciples. Mahendra recorded in his diary Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with his devotees. These are the first directly recorded words, in the spiritual history of the world, of a man recognized as belonging in the class of Buddha and Christ. Mahendra was instrumental, through his personal contacts, in spreading the Master's message among many young and aspiring souls.

Nag Mahashay

Durgacharan Nag, also known as Nag Mahashay, was the ideal householder

among the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. He was the embodiment of the Master's ideal of life in the world, unstained by worldliness. In spite of his intense desire to become a sannyasi, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to live in the world in the spirit of a monk, and the disciple truly carried out this injunction. He was born of a poor family and even during his boyhood often sacrificed everything to lessen the sufferings of the needy. He had married at an early age and after his wife's death had married a second time to obey his father's command. But he once said to his wife: "Love on the physical level never lasts. He is indeed blessed who can give his love to God with his whole heart. Even a little attachment to the body endures for several births. So do not be attached to this cage of bone and flesh. Take shelter at the feet of the Mother and think of Her alone. Thus your life here and hereafter will he ennobled." The Master spoke of him as a "blazing light". He received every word of Sri Ramakrishna in dead earnest. One day he heard the Master saying that it was difficult for doctors, lawyers, and brokers to make much progress in spirituality. Of doctors he said, "If the mind clings to the tiny drops of medicine, how can it conceive of the Infinite?" That was the end of Durgacharan's medical practice and he threw his chest of medicines into the Ganges. Sri Ramakrishna assured him that he would not lack simple food and clothing. He bade him serve holy men. On being asked where he would find real holy men, the Master said that the *sadhus* themselves would seek his company. No sannyasi could have lived a more austere life than Durgacharan.

Girish Ghosh

Girish Chandra Ghosh was a born rebel against God, a sceptic, a Bohemian, a drunkard. He was the greatest Bengali dramatist of his time, the father of the modern Bengali stage. Like other young men he had imbibed all the vices of the West. He had plunged into a life of dissipation and had become convinced that religion was only a fraud. Materialistic philosophy he justified as enabling one to get at least a little fun out of life. But a series of reverses shocked him and he became eager to solve the riddle of life. He had heard people say that in spiritual life the help of a guru was imperative and that the guru was to be regarded as God Himself. But Girish was too well acquainted with human nature to see perfection in a man. His first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna did not impress him at all. He returned home feeling as if he had seen a freak at a circus; for the Master, in a semi-conscious mood, had inquired whether it was evening, though the lamps were burning in the room. But their paths often crossed, and Girish could not avoid further encounters. The Master attended a performance in

Girish's Star Theatre. On this occasion, too, Girish found nothing impressive about him. One day, however, Girish happened to see the Master dancing and singing with the devotees. He felt the contagion and wanted to join them, but restrained himself for fear of ridicule. Another day Sri Ramakrishna was about to give him spiritual instruction, when Girish said: "I don't want to listen to instructions. I have myself written many instructions. They are of no use to me. Please help me in a more tangible way if you can." This pleased the Master and he asked Girish to cultivate faith.

As time passed, Girish began to learn that the guru is the one who silently unfolds the disciple's inner life. He became a steadfast devotee of the Master.

He often loaded the Master with insults, drank in his presence, and took liberties which astounded the other devotees. But the Master knew that at heart Girish was tender, faithful, and sincere. He would not allow Girish to give up the theatre. And when a devotee asked him to tell Girish to give up drinking, he sternly replied: "That is none of your business. He who has taken charge of him will look after him. Girish is a devotee of heroic type. I tell you, drinking will not affect him." The Master knew that mere words could not induce a man to break deep-rooted habits, but that the silent influence of love worked miracles. Therefore he never asked him to give up alcohol, with the result that Girish himself eventually broke the habit. Sri Ramakrishna had strengthened Girish's resolution by allowing him to feel that he was absolutely free.

One day Girish felt depressed because he was unable to submit to any routine of spiritual discipline. In an exalted mood the Master said to him: "All right, give me your power of attorney. Henceforth I assume responsibility for you. You need not do anything." Girish heaved a sigh of relief. He felt happy to think that Sri Ramakrishna had assumed his spiritual responsibilities. But poor Girish could not then realize that he also, on his part, had to give up his freedom and make of himself a puppet in Sri Ramakrishna's hands. The Master began to discipline him according to this new attitude. One day Girish said about a trifling matter, "Yes, I shall do this." "No, no!" the Master corrected him. "You must not speak in that egotistic manner. You should say, 'God willing, I shall do it'." Girish understood. Thenceforth he tried to give up all idea of personal responsibility and surrender himself to the Divine Will. His mind began to dwell constantly on Sri Ramakrishna. This unconscious meditation in time chastened his turbulent spirit.

The householder devotees generally visited Sri Ramakrishna on Sunday afternoons and other holidays. Thus a brotherhood was gradually formed, and the Master encouraged their fraternal feeling. Now and then he would accept an invitation to a devotee's home, where other devotees would also be invited.

Kirtan would be arranged and they would spend hours in dance and devotional music. The Master would go into trances or open his heart in religious discourses and in the narration of his own spiritual experiences. Many people who could not go to Dakshineswar participated in these meetings and felt blessed. Such an occasion would be concluded with a sumptuous feast.

But it was in the company of his younger devotees, pure souls yet unstained by the touch of worldliness, that Sri Ramakrishna took greatest joy. Among the young men who later embraced the householder's life were Narayan, Paltu, the younger Naren, Tejchandra and Purna. These visited the Master sometimes against strong opposition from home.

Purna

Purna was a lad of thirteen, whom Sri Ramakrishna described as an *Isvarakoti*, a soul born with special spiritual qualities. The Master said that Purna was the last of the group of brilliant devotees who, as he once had seen in a trance, would come to him for spiritual illumination. Purna said to Sri Ramakrishna during their second meeting, "You are God Himself incarnated in flesh and blood." Such words coming from a mere youngster proved of what stuff the boy was made.

Mahimacharan and Pratap Hazra

Mahimacharan and Pratap Hazra were two devotees outstanding for their pretentiousness and idiosyncrasies. But the Master showed them his unfailing love and kindness, though he was aware of their shortcomings. Mahimacharan Chakravarty had met the Master long before the arrival of the other disciples. He had had the intention of leading a spiritual life, but a strong desire to acquire name and fame was his weakness. He claimed to have been initiated by Totapuri and used to say that he had been following the path of knowledge according to his guru's instructions. He possessed a large library of English and Sanskrit books. But though he pretended to have read them, most of the leaves were uncut. The Master knew all his limitations, yet enjoyed listening to him recite from the Vedas and other scriptures. He would always exhort Mahima to meditate on the meaning of the scriptural texts and to practise spiritual discipline.

Pratap Hazra, a middle-aged man, hailed from a village near Kamarpukur. He was not altogether unresponsive to religious feelings. On a moment's impulse he had left his home, aged mother, wife, and children, and had found shelter in the temple garden at Dakshineswar, where he intended to lead a spiritual life. He

loved to argue, and the Master often pointed him out as an example of barren argumentation. He was hypercritical of others and cherished an exaggerated notion of his own spiritual advancement. He was mischievous and often tried to upset the minds of the Master's young disciples, criticizing them for their happy and joyous life and asking them to devote their time to meditation. The Master teasingly compared Hazra to Jatila and Kutila, the two women who always created obstructions in Krishna's sport with the gopis, and said that Hazra lived at Dakshineswar to "thicken the plot" by adding complications.

Some noted Men

Sri Ramakrishna also became acquainted with a number of people whose scholarship or wealth entitled them everywhere to respect. He had met, a few years before, Devendranath Tagore, famous all over Bengal for his wealth, scholarship, saintly character, and social position. But the Master found him disappointing; for, whereas Sri Ramakrishna expected of a saint complete renunciation of the world, Devendranath combined with his saintliness a life of enjoyment. Sri Ramakrishna met the great poet Michael Madhusudan, who had embraced Christianity "for the sake of his stomach". To him the Master could not impart instruction, for the Divine Mother "pressed his tongue". In addition he met Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, a titled aristocrat of Bengal; Kristodas Pal, the editor, social reformer, and patriot; Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the noted philanthropist and educator; Pundit Shasadhar, a great champion of Hindu orthodoxy; Aswini Kumar Dutta, a headmaster, moralist, and leader of Indian Nationalism; and Bankim Chatterji, a deputy magistrate, novelist, and essayist, and one of the fashioners of modern Bengali prose. Sri Ramakrishna was not the man to be dazzled by outward show, glory, or eloquence. A pundit without discrimination he regarded as a mere straw. He would search people's hearts for the light of God, and if that was missing, he would have nothing to do with them.

Monastic Disciples

The disciples whom the Master trained for monastic life were the following:

1. Narendranath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda)
2. Nitya Niranjan Sen (Swami Niranjanananda)
3. Rakhal Chandra Ghosh (Swami Brahmananda)
4. Kaliprasad Chandra (Swami Abhedananda)
5. Gopal Chandra Ghosh (Swami Advaitananda)

6. Harinath Chattopadhyaya (Swami Turiyananda)
7. Baburam Ghosh (Swami Premananda)
8. Sarada Prasanna (Swami Trigunatitananda)
9. Taraknath Ghoshal (Swami Shivananda)
10. Gangadhar Ghatak (Swami Akhandananda)
11. Jogindranath Choudhury (Swami Yogananda)
12. Subodh Ghosh (Swami Subodhananda)
13. Shashibhushan Chakravarty (Swami Ramakrishnananda)
14. Saratchandra Chakravarty (Swami Saradananda)
15. Hariprasanna Chatterji (Swami Vijnanananda)
16. Latu (Swami Adhbhutananda)

Latu

The first of these young men to come to the Master was Latu. Born of obscure parents, in Behar, he came to Calcutta in search of work and was engaged by Ramchandra Dutta as house-boy. Learning of the saintly Sri Ramakrishna, he visited the Master at Dakshineswar and was deeply touched by his cordiality. When he was about to leave, the Master asked him to take some money and return home in a boat or carriage. But Latu declared he had a few pennies and jingled the coins in his pocket. Sri Ramakrishna later requested Ram to allow Latu to stay with him permanently. Under Sri Ramakrishna's guidance Latu made great progress in meditation and was blessed with ecstatic visions, but all the efforts of the Master to give him a smattering of education failed. Latu was very fond of kirtan and other devotional songs but remained all his life illiterate.

Rakhal

Even before Rakhal's coming to Dakshineswar, the Master had had visions of him as his spiritual son and as a playmate of Krishna at Vrindavan. Rakhal was born of wealthy parents. During his childhood he developed wonderful spiritual traits and used to play at worshipping gods and goddesses. In his teens he was married to a sister of Manomohan Mitra, from whom he first heard of the Master. His father objected to his association with Sri Ramakrishna but afterwards was reassured to find that many celebrated people were visitors at Dakshineswar. The relationship between the Master and this beloved disciple was that of mother and child. Sri Ramakrishna allowed Rakhal many liberties denied to others. But he would not hesitate to chastise the boy for improper actions. At one time Rakhal felt a childlike jealousy because he found that other boys were receiving the Master's affection. He soon got over it and realized his

guru as the Guru of the whole universe. The Master was worried to hear of his marriage, but was relieved to find that his wife was a spiritual soul who would not be a hindrance to his progress.

The Elder Gopal

Gopal Chandra Ghosh came to Dakshineswar at a rather advanced age and was called the elder Gopal. He had lost his wife, and the Master assuaged his grief. Soon he renounced the world and devoted himself fully to meditation and prayer. Some years later Gopal gave the Master the ochre cloths with which the latter initiated several of his disciples into monastic life.

Narendra

To spread his message to the four corners of the earth Sri Ramakrishna needed a strong instrument. With his frail body and delicate limbs he could not make great journeys across wide spaces. And such an instrument was found in Narendranath Dutta, his beloved Naren, later known to the world as Swami Vivekananda. Even before meeting Narendranath, the Master had seen him in a vision as a sage, immersed in the meditation of the Absolute, who at Sri Ramakrishna's request had agreed to take human birth to assist him in his work.

Narendra was born in Calcutta on January 12, 1863, of an aristocratic *Kayastha* family. His mother was steeped in the great Hindu epics, and his father, a distinguished attorney of the Calcutta High Court, was an agnostic about religion, a friend of the poor, and a mocker at social conventions. Even in his boyhood and youth Narendra possessed great physical courage and presence of mind, a vivid imagination, deep power of thought, keen intelligence, an extraordinary memory, a love of truth, a passion for purity, a spirit of independence, and a tender heart. An expert musician, he also acquired proficiency in physics, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, history, and literature. He grew up into an extremely handsome young man. Even as a child he practised meditation and showed great power of concentration. Though free and passionate in word and action, he took the vow of austere religious chastity and never allowed the fire of purity to be extinguished by the slightest defilement of body or soul.

As he read in college the rationalistic Western philosophers of the nineteenth century, his boyhood faith in God and religion was unsettled. He would not accept religion on mere faith; he wanted demonstration of God. But very soon his passionate nature discovered that mere Universal Reason was cold and bloodless. His emotional nature, dissatisfied with a mere abstraction, required a

concrete support to help him in the hours of temptation. He wanted an external power, a guru, who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion of his soul. Attracted by the magnetic personality of Keshab, he joined the Brahmo Samaj and became a singer in its choir. But in the Samaj he did not find the guru who could say that he had seen God.

In a state of mental conflict and torture of soul, Narendra came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. He was then eighteen years of age and had been in college two years. He entered the Master's room accompanied by some light-hearted friends. At Sri Ramakrishna's request he sang a few songs, pouring his whole soul into them, and the Master went into Samadhi. A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna suddenly left his seat, took Narendra by the hand, and led him to the screened verandah north of his room. They were alone. Addressing Narendra most tenderly, as if he were a friend of long acquaintance, the Master said: "Ah! You have come very late. Why have you been so unkind as to make me wait all these days? My ears are tired of hearing the futile words of worldly men. Oh, how I have longed to pour my spirit into the heart of someone fitted to receive my message!" He talked thus, sobbing all the time. Then, standing before Narendra with folded hands, he addressed him as Narayana, born on earth to remove the misery of humanity. Grasping Narendra's hand, he asked him to come again, alone, and very soon. Narendra was startled. "What is this I have come to see?" he said to himself. "He must be stark mad. Why, I am the son of Viswanath Dutta. How dare he speak this way to me?"

When they returned to the room and Narendra heard the Master speaking to others, he was surprised to find in his words an inner logic, a striking sincerity, and a convincing proof of his spiritual nature. In answer to Narendra's question, "Sir, have you seen God?" the Master said: "Yes, I have seen God. I have seen Him more tangibly than I see you. I have talked to Him more intimately than I am talking to you." Continuing, the Master said: "But, my child, who wants to see God? People shed jugs of tears for money, wife, and children. But if they would weep for God for only one day they would surely see Him." Narendra was amazed. These words he could not doubt. This was the first time he had ever heard a man saying that he had seen God. But he could not reconcile these words of the Master with the scene that had taken place on the verandah only a few minutes before. He concluded that Sri Ramakrishna was a monomaniac, and returned home rather puzzled in mind.

During his second visit, about a month later, suddenly, at the touch of the Master, Narendra felt overwhelmed and saw the walls of the room and everything around him whirling and vanishing. "What are you doing to me?" he

cried in terror. “I have my father and mother at home.” He saw his own ego and the whole universe almost swallowed in a nameless void. With a laugh the Master easily restored him. Narendra thought he might have been hypnotized, but he could not understand how a monomaniac could cast a spell over the mind of a strong person like himself. He returned home more confused than ever, resolved to be henceforth on his guard before this strange man.

But during his third visit Narendra fared no better. This time, at the Master’s touch, he lost consciousness entirely. While he was still in that state, Sri Ramakrishna questioned him concerning his spiritual antecedents and whereabouts, his mission in this world, and the duration of his mortal life. The answers confirmed what the Master himself had known and inferred. Among other things, he came to know that Narendra was a sage who had already attained perfection, and that the day he learnt his real nature he would give up his body in yoga, by an act of will.

A few more meetings completely removed from Narendra’s mind the last traces of the notion that Sri Ramakrishna might be a monomaniac or wily hypnotist. His integrity, purity, renunciation, and unselfishness were beyond question. But Narendra could not accept a man, an imperfect mortal, as his guru. As a member of the Brahmo Samaj, he could not believe that a human intermediary was necessary between man and God. Moreover, he openly laughed at Sri Ramakrishna’s visions as hallucinations. Yet in the secret chamber of his heart he bore a great love for the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna was grateful to the Divine Mother for sending him one who doubted his own realizations. Often he asked Narendra to test him as the money-changers test their coins. He laughed at Narendra’s biting criticism of his spiritual experiences and Samadhi. When at times Narendra’s sharp words distressed him, the Divine Mother Herself would console him, saying: “Why do you listen to him? In a few days he will believe your every word.” He could hardly bear Narendra’s absences. Often he would weep bitterly for the sight of him. Sometimes Narendra would find the Master’s love embarrassing; and one day he sharply scolded him, warning him that such infatuation would soon draw him down to the level of its object. The Master was distressed and prayed to the Divine Mother. Then he said to Narendra: “You rogue, I won’t listen to you any more. Mother says that I love you because I see God in you, and the day I no longer see God in you I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you.”

The Master wanted to train Narendra in the teachings of the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy. But Narendra, because of his Brahmo upbringing,

considered it wholly blasphemous to look on man as one with his Creator. One day at the temple garden he laughingly said to a friend: “How silly! This jug is God! This cup is God! Whatever we see is God! And we too are God! Nothing could be more absurd.” Sri Ramakrishna came out of his room and gently touched him. Spellbound, he immediately perceived that everything in the world was indeed God. A new universe opened around him. Returning home in a dazed state, he found there too that the food, the plate, the eater himself, the people around him, were all God. When he walked in the street, he saw that the cabs, the horses, the streams of people, the buildings, were all Brahman. He could hardly go about his day’s business. His parents became anxious about him and thought him ill. And when the intensity of the experience abated a little, he saw the world as a dream. Walking in the public square, he would strike his head against the iron railings to know whether they were real. It took him a number of days to recover his normal self. He had a foretaste of the great experiences yet to come and realized that the words of the Vedanta were true.

At the beginning of 1884 Narendra’s father suddenly died of heart-failure, leaving the family in a state of utmost poverty. There were six or seven mouths to feed at home. Creditors were knocking at the door. Relatives who had accepted his father’s unstinted kindness now became enemies, some even bringing suit to deprive Narendra of his ancestral home. Actually starving and barefoot, Narendra searched for a job, but without success. He began to doubt whether anywhere in the world there was such a thing as unselfish sympathy. Two rich women made evil proposals to him and promised to put an end to his distress; but he refused them with contempt.

Narendra began to talk of his doubt of the very existence of God. His friends thought he had become an atheist and piously circulated gossip adducing unmentionable motives for his unbelief. His moral character was maligned. Even some of the Master’s disciples partly believed the gossip, and Narendra told these to their faces that only a coward believed in God through fear of suffering or hell. But he was distressed to think that Sri Ramakrishna, too, might believe these false reports. His pride revolted. He said to himself: “What does it matter? If a man’s good name rests on such slender foundations, I don’t care.” But later on he was amazed to learn that the Master had never lost faith in him. To a disciple who complained about Narendra’s degradation, Sri Ramakrishna replied: “Hush, you fool! The Mother has told me it can never be so. I won’t look at you if you speak that way again.”

The moment came when Narendra’s distress reached its climax. He had gone the whole day without food. As he was returning home in the evening he could hardly lift his tired limbs. He sat down in front of a house in sheer exhaustion,

too weak even to think. His mind began to wander. Then, suddenly, a divine power lifted the veil over his soul. He found the solution of the problem of the coexistence of divine justice and misery, the presence of suffering in the creation of a blissful Providence. He felt bodily refreshed, his soul was bathed in peace, and he slept serenely.

Narendra now realized that he had a spiritual mission to fulfil. He resolved to renounce the world, as his grandfather had renounced it, and he came to Sri Ramakrishna for his blessing. But even before he had opened his mouth, the Master knew what was in his mind and wept bitterly at the thought of separation. "I know you cannot lead a worldly life," he said, "but for my sake live in the world as long as I live."

One day, soon after, Narendra requested Sri Ramakrishna to pray to the Divine Mother to remove his poverty. Sri Ramakrishna bade him pray to Her himself, for She would certainly listen to his prayer. Narendra entered the shrine of Kali. As he stood before the image of the Mother, he beheld Her as a living Goddess, ready to give wisdom and liberation. Unable to ask Her for petty worldly things, he prayed only for knowledge and renunciation, love and liberation. The Master rebuked him for his failure to ask the Divine Mother to remove his poverty and sent him back to the temple. But Narendra, standing in Her presence, again forgot the purpose of his coming. Thrice he went to the temple at the bidding of the Master, and thrice he returned, having forgotten in Her presence why he had come. He was wondering about it when it suddenly flashed in his mind that this was all the work of Sri Ramakrishna; so now he asked the Master himself to remove his poverty, and was assured that his family would not lack simple food and clothing.

This was a very rich and significant experience for Narendra. It taught him that Shakti, the Divine Power, cannot be ignored in the world and that in the relative plane the need of worshipping a Personal God is imperative. Sri Ramakrishna was overjoyed with the conversion. The next day, sitting almost on Narendra's lap, he said to a devotee, pointing first to himself, then to Narendra: "I see I am this, and again that. Really I feel no difference. A stick floating in the Ganges seems to divide the water; but in reality the water is one. Do you see my point? Well, whatever is, is the Mother—isn't that so?" In later years Narendra would say: "Sri Ramakrishna was the only person who, from the time he met me, believed in me uniformly throughout. Even my mother and brothers did not. It was his unwavering trust and love for me that bound me to him for ever. He alone knew how to love. Worldly people only make a show of love for selfish ends."

Tarak

Others destined to be monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna came to Dakshineswar. Taraknath Ghoshal had felt from his boyhood the noble desire to realize God. Keshab and the Brahmo Samaj had attracted him but proved inadequate. In 1882 he first met the Master at Ramchandra's house and was astonished to hear him talk about Samadhi, a subject which always fascinated his mind. And that evening he actually saw a manifestation of that superconscious state in the Master. Tarak became a frequent visitor at Dakshineswar and received the Master's grace in abundance. The young boy often felt ecstatic fervour in meditation. He also wept profusely while meditating on God. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "God favours those who can weep for Him. Tears shed for God wash away the sins of former births."

Baburam

Baburam Ghosh came to Dakshineswar accompanied by Rakhal, his classmate. The Master, as was often his custom, examined the boy's physiognomy and was satisfied about his latent spirituality. At the age of eight Baburam had thought of leading a life of renunciation, in the company of a monk, in a hut shut out from the public view by a thick wall of trees. The very sight of the Panchavati awakened in his heart that dream of boyhood. Baburam was tender in body and soul. The Master used to say that he was pure to his very bones. One day Hazra in his usual mischievous fashion advised Baburam and some of the other young boys to ask Sri Ramakrishna for some spiritual powers and not waste their life in mere gaiety and merriment. The Master, scenting mischief, called Baburam to his side, and said: "What can you ask of me? Isn't everything that I have already yours? Yes, everything I have earned in the shape of realizations is for the sake of you all. So get rid of the idea of begging, which alienates by creating a distance. Rather realize your kinship with me and gain the key to all the treasures."

Niranjan

Nitya Niranjan Sen was a disciple of heroic type. He came to the Master when he was eighteen years old. He was a medium for a group of spiritualists. During his first visit the Master said to him: "My boy, if you think always of ghosts you will become a ghost, and if you think of God you will become God. Now, which do you prefer?" Niranjan severed all connections with the spiritualists. During his second visit the Master embraced him and said warmly: "Niranjan, my boy,

the days are flitting away. When will you realize God? This life will be in vain if you do not realize Him. When will You devote your mind wholly to God?" Niranjan was surprised to see the Master's great anxiety for his spiritual welfare. He was a young man endowed with unusual spiritual parts. He felt disdain for worldly pleasures and was totally guileless, like a child. But he had a violent temper. One day, as he was coming in a country boat to Dakshineswar, some of his fellow passengers began to speak ill of the Master. Finding his protest futile, Niranjan began to rock the boat, threatening to sink it in midstream. That silenced the offenders. When he reported the incident to the Master, he was rebuked for his inability to curb his anger.

Jogindra

Jogindranath, on the other hand, was gentle to a fault. One day, under circumstances very like those that had evoked Niranjan's anger, he curbed his temper and held his peace instead of threatening Sri Ramakrishna's abusers. The Master, learning of his conduct, scolded him roundly. Thus to each the fault of the other was recommended as a virtue. The guru was striving to develop, in the first instance, composure, and in the second, mettle. The secret of his training was to build up, by a tactful recognition of the requirements of each given case, the character of the devotee.

Jogindranath came of an aristocratic brahmin family of Dakshineswar. His father and relatives shared the popular mistrust of Sri Ramakrishna's sanity. At a very early age the boy developed religious tendencies, spending two or three hours daily in meditation, and his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna deepened his desire for the realization of God. He had a perfect horror of marriage. But at the earnest request of his mother he had had to yield, and he now believed that his spiritual future was doomed. So he kept himself away from the Master.

Sri Ramakrishna employed a ruse to bring Jogindra to him. As soon as the disciple entered the room, the Master rushed forward to meet the young man. Catching hold of the disciple's hand, he said: "What if you have married, Haven't I too married? What is there to be afraid of in that?" Touching his own chest he said: "If this [meaning himself] is propitious, then even a hundred thousand marriages cannot injure you. It you desire to lead a householder's life, then bring your wife here one day, and I shall see that she becomes a real companion in your spiritual progress. But if you want to lead a monastic life, then I shall eat up your attachment to the world." Jogin was dumbfounded at these words. He received new strength, and his spirit of renunciation was re-established.

Sashi and Sarat

Sashi and Sarat were two cousins who came from a pious brahmin family of Calcutta. At an early age they had joined the Brahmo Samaj and had come under the influence of Keshab Sen. The Master said to them at their first meeting: “If bricks and tiles are burnt after the trade-mark has been stamped on them, they retain the mark for ever. Similarly, man should be stamped with God before entering the world. Then he will not become attached to worldliness.” Fully aware of the future course of their life, he asked them not to marry. The Master asked Sashi whether he believed in God with form or in God without form. Sashi replied that he was not even sure about the existence of God; so he could not speak one way or the other. This frank answer very much pleased the Master.

Sarat’s soul longed for the all-embracing realization of the Godhead. When the Master inquired whether there was any particular form of God he wished to see, the boy replied that he would like to see God in all the living beings of the world. “But”, the Master demurred, “that is the last word in realization. One cannot have it at the very outset.” Sarat stated calmly: “I won’t be satisfied with anything short of that. I shall trudge on along the path till I attain that blessed state.” Sri Ramakrishna was very much pleased.

Harinath

Harinath had led the austere life of a *brahmachari* even from his early boyhood—bathing in the Ganges every day, cooking his own meals, waking before sunrise, and reciting the Gita from memory before leaving bed. He found in the Master the embodiment of the Vedanta scriptures. Aspiring to be a follower of the ascetic Sankara, he cherished a great hatred for women. One day he said to the Master that he could not allow even small girls to come near him. The Master scolded him and said: “You are talking like a fool. Why should you hate women? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Regard them as your own mother and you will never feel their evil influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into their snares.” Hari said later that these words completely changed his attitude toward women.

The Master knew Hari’s passion for Vedanta. But he did not wish any of his disciples to become a dry ascetic or a mere bookworm. So he asked Hari to practise Vedanta in life by giving up the unreal and following the Real. “But it is not so easy”, Sri Ramakrishna said, “to realize the illusoriness of the world. Study alone does not help one very much. The grace of God is required. Mere personal effort is futile. A man is a tiny creature after all, with very limited

powers. But he can achieve the impossible if he prays to God for His grace." Whereupon the Master sang a song in praise of grace. Hari was profoundly moved and shed tears. Later in life Hari achieved a wonderful synthesis of the ideals of the Personal God and the Impersonal Truth.

Gangadhar

Gangadhar, Harinath's friend, also led the life of a strict *brahmachari,* eating vegetarian food cooked by his own hands and devoting himself to the study of the scriptures. He met the Master in 1884 and soon became a member of his inner circle. The Master praised his ascetic habit and attributed it to the spiritual disciplines of his past life. Gangadhar became a close companion of Narendra.

Hariprasanna

Hariprasanna, a college student, visited the Master in the company of his friends Sashi and Sarat. Sri Ramakrishna showed him great favour by initiating him into spiritual life. As long as he lived, Hariprasanna remembered and observed the following drastic advice of the Master: "Even if a woman is pure as gold and rolls on the ground for love of God, it is dangerous for a monk ever to look at her."

Kali

Kaliprasad visited the Master toward the end of 1883. Given to the practice of meditation and the study of the scriptures, Kali was particularly interested in yoga. Feeling the need of a guru in spiritual life, he came to the Master and was accepted as a disciple. The young boy possessed a rational mind and often felt sceptical about the Personal God. The Master said to him: "Your doubts will soon disappear. Others, too, have passed through such a state of mind. Look at Naren. He now weeps at the names of Radha and Krishna." Kali began to see visions of gods and goddesses. Very soon these disappeared and in meditation he experienced vastness, infinity, and the other attributes of the Impersonal Brahman.

Subodh

Subodh visited the Master in 1885. At the very first meeting Sri Ramakrishna said to him: "You will succeed. Mother says so. Those whom She sends here will certainly attain spirituality." During the second meeting the Master wrote something on Subodh's tongue, stroked his body from the navel to the throat,

and said, “Awake, Mother! Awake.” He asked the boy to meditate. At once Subodh’s latent spirituality was awakened. He felt a current rushing along the spinal column to the brain. Joy filled his soul.

Sarada and Tulasi

Two more young men, Sarada Prasanna and Tulasi, complete the small band of the Master’s disciples later to embrace the life of the wandering monk. With the exception of the elder Gopal, all of them were in their teens or slightly over. They came from middle-class Bengali families, and most of them were students in school or college. Their parents and relatives had envisaged for them bright worldly careers. They came to Sri Ramakrishna with pure bodies, vigorous minds, and uncontaminated souls. All were born with unusual spiritual attributes. Sri Ramakrishna accepted them, even at first sight, as his children, relatives, friends, and companions. His magic touch unfolded them. And later each according to his measure reflected the life of the Master, becoming a torch-bearer of his message across land and sea.

Woman Devotees

With his woman devotees Sri Ramakrishna established a very sweet relationship. He himself embodied the tender traits of a woman; he had dwelt on the highest plane of Truth, where there is not even the slightest trace of sex; and his innate purity evoked only the noblest emotion in men and women alike. His woman devotees often said: “We seldom looked on Sri Ramakrishna as a member of the male sex. We regarded him as one of us. We never felt any constraint before him, He was our best confidant.” They loved him as their child, their friend, and their teacher. In spiritual discipline he advised them to renounce lust and greed and especially warned them not to fall into the snares of men.

Gopal Ma

Unsurpassed among the woman devotees of the Master in the richness of her devotion and spiritual experiences was Aghoramani Devi, an orthodox brahmin woman. Widowed at an early age, she had dedicated herself completely to spiritual pursuits. Gopala, the Baby Krishna, was her Ideal Deity, whom she worshipped following the *Vatsalya* attitude of the Vaishnava religion, regarding Him as her own child. Through Him she satisfied her unassuaged maternal love, cooking for Him, feeding Him, bathing Him, and putting Him to bed. This sweet intimacy with Gopala won her the sobriquet of Gopal Ma, or Gopala’s Mother.

For forty years she had lived on the bank of the Ganges in a small bare room, her only companions being a threadbare copy of the Ramayana and a bag containing her rosary. At the age of sixty, in 1884, she visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. During the second visit, as soon as the Master saw her, he said: "Oh, you have come! Give me something to eat." With great hesitation she gave him some ordinary sweets that she had purchased for him on the way. The Master ate them with relish and asked her to bring him simple curries or sweets prepared by her own hands. Gopal Ma thought him a queer kind of monk, for, instead of talking of God, he always asked for food. She did not want to visit him again, but an irresistible attraction brought her back to the temple garden. She carried with her some simple curries that she had cooked herself.

One early morning at three o'clock, about a year later, Gopal Ma was about to finish her daily devotions, when she was startled to find Sri Ramakrishna sitting on her left, with his right hand clenched, like the hand of the image of Gopala. She was amazed and caught hold of the hand, whereupon the figure vanished and in its place appeared the real Gopala, her Ideal Deity. She cried aloud with joy. Gopala begged her for butter. She pleaded her poverty and gave Him some dry coconut candies. Gopala sat on her lap, snatched away her rosary, jumped on her shoulders, and moved all about the room. As soon as the day broke she hastened to Dakshineswar like an insane woman. Of course Gopala accompanied her, resting His head on her shoulder. She clearly saw His tiny ruddy feet hanging over her breast. She entered Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master had fallen into Samadhi. Like a child, he sat on her lap, and she began to feed him with butter, cream, and other delicacies. After some time he regained consciousness and returned to his bed. But the mind of Gopala's Mother was still roaming in another plane. She was steeped in bliss. She saw Gopala frequently entering the Master's body and again coming out of it. When she returned to her hut, still in a dazed condition, Gopala accompanied her.

She spent about two months in uninterrupted communion with God, the Baby Gopala never leaving her for a moment. Then the intensity of her vision was lessened; had it not been, her body would have perished. The Master spoke highly of her exalted spiritual condition and said that such vision of God was a rare thing for ordinary mortals. The fun-loving Master one day confronted the critical Narendranath with this simple-minded woman. No two could have presented a more striking contrast. The Master knew of Narendra's lofty contempt for all visions, and he asked the old lady to narrate her experiences to Narendra. With great hesitation she told him her story. Now and then she interrupted her maternal chatter to ask Narendra: "My son, I am a poor ignorant woman. I don't understand anything. You are so learned. Now tell me if these

visions of Gopala are true." As Narendra listened to the story he was profoundly moved. He said, "Yes, mother, they are quite true." Behind his cynicism Narendra, too, possessed a heart full of love and tenderness.

Injury to the Master's Arm

One day, in January 1884, the Master was going toward the pine-grove when he went into a trance. He was alone. There was no one to support him or guide his footsteps. He fell to the ground and dislocated a bone in his left arm. This accident had a significant influence on his mind, the natural inclination of which was to soar above the consciousness of the body. The acute pain in the arm forced his mind to dwell on the body and on the world outside. But he saw even in this a divine purpose; for, with his mind compelled to dwell on the physical plane, he realized more than ever that he was an instrument in the hand of the Divine Mother, who had a mission to fulfil through his human body and mind. He also distinctly found that in the phenomenal world God manifests Himself, in an inscrutable way, through diverse human beings, both good and evil. Thus he would speak of God in the guise of the wicked, God in the guise of the pious, God in the guise of the hypocrite, God in the guise of the lewd. He began to take a special delight in watching the divine play in the relative world. Sometimes the sweet human relationship with God would appear to him more appealing than the all-effacing Knowledge of Brahman. Many a time he would pray: "Mother, don't make me unconscious through the Knowledge of Brahman. Don't give me *Brahmajnana*, Mother. Am I not Your child, and naturally timid? I must have my Mother. A million salutations to the Knowledge of Brahman! Give it to those who want it." Again he prayed: "O Mother, let me remain in contact with men! Don't make me a dried-up ascetic. I want to enjoy Your sport in the world." He was able to taste this very rich divine experience and enjoy the love of God and the company of His devotees because his mind, on account of the injury to his arm, was forced to come down to the consciousness of the body. Again, he would make fun of people who proclaimed him as a Divine Incarnation, by pointing to his broken arm. He would say, "Have you ever heard of God breaking His arm?" It took the arm about five months to heal.

Beginning of His Illness

In April 1885 the Master's throat became inflamed. Prolonged conversation or absorption in Samadhi, making the blood flow into the throat, would aggravate the pain. Yet when the annual Vaishnava festival was celebrated at Panihati, Sri Ramakrishna attended it against the doctor's advice. With a group of disciples he

spent himself in music, dance, and ecstasy. The illness took a turn for the worse and was diagnosed as “clergyman’s sore throat”. The patient was cautioned against conversation and ecstasies. Though he followed the physician’s directions regarding medicine and diet, he could neither control his trances nor withhold from seekers the solace of his advice. Sometimes, like a sulky child, he would complain to the Mother about the crowds, who gave him no rest day or night. He was overheard to say to Her: “Why do You bring here all these worthless people, who are like milk diluted with five times its own quantity of water? My eyes are almost destroyed with blowing the fire to dry up the water. My health is gone. It is beyond my strength. Do it Yourself, if You want it done. This (pointing to his own body) is but a perforated drum, and if you go on beating it day in and day out, how long will it last?”

But his large heart never turned anyone away. He said, “Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if I can be of help to a single soul.” And he bore the pain, singing cheerfully, “Let the body be preoccupied with illness, but, O mind, dwell for ever in God’s Bliss!”

One night he had a haemorrhage of the throat. The doctor now diagnosed the illness as cancer. Narendra was the first to break this heart-rending news to the disciples. Within three days the Master was removed to Calcutta for better treatment. At Balaram’s house he remained a week until a suitable place could be found at Shyampukur, in the northern section of Calcutta. During this week he dedicated himself practically without respite to the instruction of those beloved devotees who had been unable to visit him oftener at Dakshineswar. Discourses incessantly flowed from his tongue, and he often went into Samadhi. Dr. Mahendra Sarkar, the celebrated homeopath of Calcutta, was invited to undertake his treatment.

Shyampukur

In the beginning of September 1885 Sri Ramakrishna was moved to Shyampukur. Here Narendra organized the young disciples to attend the Master day and night. At first they concealed the Master’s illness from their guardians; but when it became more serious they remained with him almost constantly, sweeping aside the objections of their relatives and devoting themselves whole-heartedly to the nursing of their beloved guru. These young men, under the watchful eyes of the Master and the leadership of Narendra, became the *Antaranga* Bhaktas, the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna’s inner circle. They were privileged to witness many manifestations of the Master’s divine powers. Narendra received instructions regarding the propagation of his message after his

death.

The Holy Mother—so Sarada Devi had come to be affectionately known by Sri Ramakrishna's devotees—was brought from Dakshineswar to look after the general cooking and to prepare the special diet of the patient. The dwelling space being extremely limited, she had to adapt herself to cramped conditions. At three o'clock in the morning she would finish her bath in the Ganges and then enter a small covered place on the roof, where she spent the whole day cooking and praying. After eleven at night, when the visitors went away, she would come down to her small bedroom on the first floor to enjoy a few hours' sleep. Thus she spent three months, working hard, sleeping little, and praying constantly for the Master's recovery.

At Shyampukur the devotees led an intense life. Their attendance on the Master was in itself a form of spiritual discipline. His mind was constantly soaring to an exalted plane of consciousness. Now and then they would catch the contagion of his spiritual fervour. They sought to divine the meaning of this illness of the Master, whom most of them had accepted as an Incarnation of God. One group, headed by Girish with his robust optimism and great power of imagination, believed that the illness was a mere pretext to serve a deeper purpose. The Master had willed his illness in order to bring the devotees together and promote solidarity among them. As soon as this purpose was served, he would himself get rid of the disease. A second group thought that the Divine Mother, in whose hand the Master was an instrument, had brought about this illness to serve Her own mysterious ends. But the young rationalists, led by Narendra, refused to ascribe a supernatural cause to a natural phenomenon. They believed that the Master's body, a material thing, was subject, like all other material things, to physical laws. Growth, development, decay, and death were laws of nature to which the Master's body could not but respond. But though holding differing views, they all believed that it was to him alone that they must look for the attainment of their spiritual goal.

The more the body was devastated by illness, the more it became the habitation of the Divine Spirit. Through its transparency the gods and goddesses began to shine with ever increasing luminosity. On the day of the Kali Puja the devotees clearly saw in him the manifestation of the Divine Mother.

It was noticed at this time that some of the devotees were making an unbridled display of their emotions. A number of them, particularly among the householders, began to cultivate, though at first unconsciously, the art of shedding tears, shaking the body, contorting the face, and going into trances, attempting thereby to imitate the Master. They began openly to declare Sri Ramakrishna a Divine Incarnation and to regard themselves as his chosen

people, who could neglect religious disciplines with impunity. Narendra's penetrating eye soon sized up the situation. He found out that some of these external manifestations were being carefully practised at home, while some were the outcome of malnutrition, mental weakness, or nervous debility. He mercilessly exposed the devotees who were pretending to have visions, and asked all to develop a healthy religious spirit. Narendra sang inspiring songs for the younger devotees, read with them the Imitation of Christ and the Gita, and held before them the positive ideals of spirituality.

Last Days at Cossipore

When Sri Ramakrishna's illness showed signs of aggravation, the devotees, following the advice of Dr. Sarkar, rented a spacious garden house at Cossipore, in the northern suburbs of Calcutta. The Master was removed to this place on December 11, 1885.

It was at Cossipore that the curtain fell on the varied activities of the Master's life on the physical plane. His soul lingered in the body eight months more. It was the period of his great Passion, a constant crucifixion of the body and the triumphant revelation of the Soul. Here one sees the humanity and divinity of the Master passing and repassing across a thin border line. Every minute of those eight months was suffused with touching tenderness of heart and breath-taking elevation of spirit. Every word he uttered was full of pathos and sublimity.

It took the group only a few days to become adjusted to the new environment. The Holy Mother, assisted by Sri Ramakrishna's niece, Lakshmi Devi, and a few woman devotees, took charge of the cooking for the Master and his attendants. Surendra willingly bore the major portion of the expenses, other householders contributing according to their means. Twelve disciples were constant attendants of the Master: Narendra, Rakhal, Baburam, Niranjan, Jogin, Latu, Tarak, the elder Gopal, Kali, Sashi, Sarat, and the younger Gopal. Sarada, Harish, Hari, Gangadhar, and Tulasi visited the Master from time to time and practised sadhana at home. Narendra, preparing for his law examination, brought his books to the garden house in order to continue his studies during the infrequent spare moments. He encouraged his brother disciples to intensify their meditation, scriptural studies, and other spiritual disciplines. They all forgot their relatives and their worldly duties.

Among the attendants Sashi was the embodiment of service. He did not practise meditation, japa, or any of the other disciplines followed by his brother devotees. He was convinced that service to the guru was the only religion for him. He forgot food and rest and was ever ready at the Master's bedside.

“I shall make the whole thing public before I go”, the Master had said some time before. On January 1, 1886, he felt better and came down to the garden for a little stroll. It was about three o’clock in the afternoon. Some thirty lay disciples were in the hall or sitting about under the trees. Sri Ramakrishna said to Girish, “Well, Girish, what have you seen in me, that you proclaim me before everybody as an Incarnation of God?” Girish was not the man to be taken by surprise. He knelt before the Master and said with folded hands, “What can an insignificant person like myself say about the One whose glory even sages like Vyasa and Valmiki could not adequately measure?” The Master was profoundly moved. He said: “What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined!” He fell into a spiritual mood. Hearing these words the devotees, one and all, became overwhelmed with emotion. They rushed to him and fell at his feet. He touched them all, and each received an appropriate benediction. Each of them, at the touch of the Master, experienced ineffable bliss. Some laughed, some wept, some sat down to meditate, some began to pray. Some saw light, some had visions of their Chosen Ideals, and some felt within their bodies the rush of spiritual power.

Narendra, consumed with a terrific fever for realization, complained to the Master that all the others had attained peace and that he alone was dissatisfied. The Master asked what he wanted. Narendra begged for Samadhi, so that he might altogether forget the world for three or four days at a time. “You are a fool”, the Master rebuked him. “There is a state even higher than that. Isn’t it you who sing, ‘All that exists art Thou’? First of all settle your family affairs and then come to me. You will experience a state even higher than Samadhi.”

The Master did not hide the fact that he wished to make Narendra his spiritual heir. Narendra was to continue the work after Sri Ramakrishna’s passing. Sri Ramakrishna said to him: “I leave these young men in your charge. See that they develop their spirituality and do not return home.” One day he asked the boys, in preparation for a monastic life, to beg their food from door to door without thought of caste. They hailed the Master’s order and went out with begging-bowls. A few days later he gave the ochre cloth of the sannyasi to each of them, including Girish, who was now second to none in his spirit of renunciation. Thus the Master himself laid the foundation of the future Ramakrishna Order of monks.

Sri Ramakrishna was sinking day by day. His diet was reduced to a minimum and he found it almost impossible to swallow. He whispered to M.: “I am bearing all this cheerfully, for otherwise you would be weeping. If you all say that it is better that the body should go rather than suffer this torture, I am willing.” The next morning he said to his depressed disciples seated near the

bed: “Do you know what I see? I see that God alone has become everything. Men and animals are only frameworks covered with skin, and it is He who is moving through their heads and limbs. I see that it is God Himself who has become the block, the executioner, and the victim for the sacrifice.” He fainted with emotion. Regaining partial consciousness, he said: “Now I have no pain. I am very well.” Looking at Latu he said: “There sits Latu resting his head on the palm of his hand. To me it is the Lord who is seated in that posture.”

The words were tender and touching. Like a mother he caressed Narendra and Rakhal, gently stroking their faces. He said in a half whisper to M., “Had this body been allowed to last a little longer, many more souls would have been illumined.” He paused a moment and then said: “But Mother has ordained otherwise. She will take me away lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me and persuade me to bestow on them the rare gifts of spirituality.” A few minutes later he touched his chest and said: “Here are two beings. One is She and the other is Her devotee. It is the latter who broke his arm, and it is he again who is now ill. Do you understand me?” After a pause he added: “Alas! To whom shall I tell all this? Who will understand me?” “Pain”, he consoled them again, “is unavoidable as long as there is a body. The Lord takes on the body for the sake of His devotees.”

Yet one is not sure whether the Master’s soul actually was tortured by this agonizing disease. At least during his moments of spiritual exaltation—which became almost constant during the closing days of his life on earth—he lost all consciousness of the body, of illness and suffering. One of his attendants said later on: “While Sri Ramakrishna lay sick he never actually suffered pain. He would often say: ‘O mind! Forget the body, forget the sickness, and remain merged in Bliss.’ No, he did not really suffer. At times, he would be in a state when the thrill of joy was clearly manifested in his body. Even when he could not speak he would let us know in some way that there was no suffering, and this fact was clearly evident to all who watched him. People who did not understand him thought that his suffering was very great. What spiritual joy he transmitted to us at that time! Could such a thing have been possible if he had been suffering physically? It was during this period that he taught us again these truths. ‘Brahman is always unattached. The three *gunas* are in It, but It is unaffected by them, just as the wind carries odour yet remains odourless.’ ‘Brahman is Infinite Being, In finite Wisdom, Infinite Bliss. In It there exist no delusion, no misery, no disease, no death, no growth, no decay.’ ‘The Transcendental Being and the being within are one and the same. There is one indivisible Absolute Existence.’

The Holy Mother secretly went to a Shiva temple across the Ganges to intercede with the Deity for the Master’s recovery. In a revelation she was told to

prepare herself for the inevitable end.

Some days later, Narendra being alone with the Master, Sri Ramakrishna looked at him and went into Samadhi. Narendra felt the penetration of a subtle force and lost all outer consciousness. Regaining presently the normal mood, he found the Master weeping.

Sri Ramakrishna said to him: “Today I have given you my all and I am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world, and not until it is accomplished will you return.” Henceforth the Master lived in the disciple.

Doubt, however, dies hard. After one or two days Narendra said to himself, “If in the midst of this racking physical pain he declares his Godhead, then only shall I accept him as an Incarnation of God.” He was alone by the bedside of the Master. It was a passing thought, but the Master smiled. Gathering his remaining strength, he distinctly said, “He who was Rama and Krishna is now, in this body, Ramakrishna—but not in your Vedantic sense.” Narendra was stricken with shame.

Maha–samadhi

Sunday, August 15, 1886. The Master’s pulse became irregular. The devotees stood by the bedside. Toward dusk Sri Ramakrishna had difficulty in breathing. A short time afterwards he complained of hunger. A little liquid food was put into his mouth; some of it he swallowed, and the rest ran over his chin. Two attendants began to fan him. All at once he went into Samadhi of a rather unusual type. The body became stiff. Sashi burst into tears. But after midnight the Master revived. He was now very hungry and helped himself to a bowl of porridge. He said he was strong again. He sat up against five or six pillows, which were supported by the body of Sashi, who was fanning him. Narendra took his feet on his lap and began to rub them. Again and again, the Master repeated to him, “Take care of these boys.” Then, he asked to lie down. Three times in ringing tones he cried the name of **Kali,** his life’s Beloved, and lay back. At two minutes past one there was a low sound in his throat and he fell a little to one side. A thrill passed over his body. His hair stood on end. His eyes became fixed on the tip of his nose. His face was lighted with a smile. The final ecstasy began. It was *Maha–samadhi,* total absorption, from which his mind never returned. Narendra, unable to bear it, ran downstairs.

Dr. Sarkar arrived the following noon and pronounced that life had departed not more than half an hour before. At five o’clock the Master’s body was

brought downstairs, laid on a cot, dressed in ochre clothes, and decorated with sandal-past and flowers. A procession was formed. The passers-by wept as the body was taken to the cremation ground at the Baranagore Ghat on the Ganges.

While the devotees were returning to the garden house, carrying the urn with the sacred ashes, a calm resignation came to their souls and they cried, “Victory unto the Guru!”

The Holy Mother was weeping in her room, not for her husband, but because she felt that Mother Kali had left her. As she was about to put off the marks of a Hindu widow, in a moment of revelation she heard the words of faith “I have only passed from one room to another.”

Vishnupada (the feet of lord Vishnu) at Gaya

At Gaya, Khudiram Chattopadhyay (Sri Ramakrishna’s father) dreamt that he was inside the temple. The Lord looked at him, asked him to come forward and told him ‘’your great devotion has made me so happy that I shall be born again on this earth as your son’’

Old Kamarpukur

Kamarpukur Shiva Temple

Old Kamarpukur road

Bel tree at Sihar

Old Ancestral home of Sri Ramakrishna with family deities

Sri Ramakrishna’s Pathsala (Primary School of the Lahas at Kamarpukur)

Sri Ramakrishna’s Old House

Holy Mother’s Old House at Jayrambati

Barujjey Pukur (The Pond of the Banerjees), Old Kamarpukur

Yogi Shiva Temple Shrine, Old Kamarpukur

Early picture of Jagadamba ashrama, Koalpara

SRI RAMAKRISHNA IN HIS OWN WORDS

BIRTH AND EARLY DAYS

My father never accepted gifts from a shudra (the labouring caste). He spent most of the day in worship, japa, and meditation. While practising his daily spiritual disciplines, when he would recite the invocation of the Gayatri mantra, ‘Do Thou reveal to me, O Goddess Gayatri, the giver of boons,’ and so on, his chest would swell and turn crimson. Tears flowed from his eyes. When he was not engaged in worship, he would spend his time making flower garlands with needle and thread to decorate Raghuvir. He left his parental home because he refused to give false testimony. The villagers loved and respected him as a rishi.

When my father walked along the lanes of the village wearing his wooden sandals, the shopkeepers would stand up out of respect and say, ‘There he comes!’ When he bathed in the Haldarpukur, the villagers would not have the courage to get into the water. Before bathing they would inquire if he had finished his bath. When my father chanted the name of Raghuvir, his chest would turn crimson. This also happened to me. When I saw the cows at Vrindavan returning from the pasture, I was transported into a divine mood and my body became red.

My mother was an embodiment of simplicity. She was not worldly-wise at all; she did not even know how to count money. She was not clever enough to keep confidences when necessary. She would divulge whatever was in her mind to everyone. That is why people called her ‘loose-lipped.’ She was fond of feeding people.

People of bygone generations had tremendous faith. What faith Haladhari’s father had! Once he was on the way to his daughter’s house when he noticed some beautiful flowers and bel-Ieaves. He gathered these for the worship of the Family Deity and walked back five or six miles to his own house.

Once, a theatrical troupe in the village was enacting the life of Rama, When Kaikeyi asked Rama to go to exile in the forest, Haladhari’s father, who had been watching the performance, sprang up. He went to the actor who played Kaikeyi, crying out, ‘You wretch!’, and was about to burn the actor’s face with a torch. He was a very pious man. After finishing ablutions he would stand in the water and meditate on the Deity, reciting the invocation: ‘I meditate on Thee, of red hue and four faces’, while tears streamed down his cheeks.

Once, my father went to Gaya. There Raghuvir said to him in a dream, ‘I shall be born as your son.’ Thereupon my father said to Him, ‘O Lord, I am a poor brahmin. How shall I be able to serve You?’ ‘Don’t worry about it’, Raghuvir replied, ‘It will be taken care of.’

I was born on the second day of the bright fortnight of the moon. My horoscope shows the positions of the Sun, the Moon, and Mercury at the time of my birth. There are not many more details.

During my younger days the men and women of Kamar-pukur were equally fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate other people’s gestures and conversation, and I used to entertain them that way. The women would put aside things for me to eat. No one distrusted me. Everybody took me in as one of the family.

But I was like a happy pigeon. I used to frequent only happy families. I would run away from a place where I saw misery and suffering. One or two young boys of the village were my close friends. I was very intimate with some of them; but now they are totally immersed in worldliness. A few of them visit me here now and then and say, ‘Goodness! He seems to be just the same as he was in the village school!’

While I was at school, arithmetic would throw me into confusion, but I could paint very well and could also model small images of the deities at my young age in the country. I could model the image of Lord Krishna with a flute in his hand. In this way I could model images of various gods and goddesses. I further sold those images at the rate of five or six annas. Again, I could model dolls, with provision of springs for their movement. The technicians of the Ras festival sometimes came to me for making proper styles ... I also knew the art of brickworks.

I loved to visit the free eating-places maintained for holy men and the poor, and would watch them for hours. I loved to hear the reading of sacred books such as the Ramayana and Bhagavata. If the readers had any affectations, I could easily imitate them and would entertain others with my mimicry.

During my boyhood I could understand what the sadhus read at the Laha’s house at Kamarpukur, although I would miss a little here and there. If a pundit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it myself.

I understood the behaviour of women very well and imitated their words and intonations. I could easily recognize immoral women. Immoral widows part their hair in the middle and perform their toilet with great care. They have *very* little modesty. The way they sit is so different!

Hold not, hold not the chariot’s wheels!Is it the wheels that make it move?The

Mover of its wheels is Krishna.By whose will the worlds are moved.

I used to sing these songs very often during my boyhood. (When Ramlal sang the above song Sri Ramakrishna said) I could reproduce the whole drama from memory.

In that part of the country (Kamarpukur) children are given puffed rice to eat from small baskets. Those who are poor and have no baskets eat from the corner of a cloth. Boys go out to play on the roads or in the fields carrying puffed rice either in a basket or in the corner of a cloth. It was June or July. I was then six or seven years old. One morning I took some puffed rice in a small basket and was eating it as I walked along the narrow ridges of the rice fields. In one part of the sky a beautiful black cloud appeared, heavy with rain. I was watching it and eating the puffed rice. Very soon the cloud covered almost the whole sky. Then a flock of cranes came flying, white as milk against the black cloud. It was so beautiful that I became absorbed in the sight; I lost consciousness of everything outside of myself. I fell down, and the puffed rice was scattered over the ground. I cannot say how long I was in that state. Some people saw this and carried me home. That was the first time I lost external consciousness due to ecstasy.

I experienced one of my first ecstasies (actually second ecstasy) when I was ten or eleven years old, as I was going through a meadow to the shrine of Vishalakshi. What a vision! I became completely unconscious of the outer world.

I used frequently to visit a certain house at Kamarpukur. The boys of the family were of my age. Their mother used to hate people. Then something happened to her foot, and gangrene set in. On account of the foul smell, no one could enter her room.

I saw a deputy magistrate at Kamarpukur. His name was Iswar Ghoshal. He had a turban on his head. Men’s very bones trembled before him. I remember having seen him during my boyhood. Is a deputy magistrate a person to be trifled with? As a boy, at Kamarpukur, I loved Ram Mallick dearly. But afterwards, when he came here, I couldn’t even touch him. Ram Mallick and I were great friends during our boyhood. At that time, I was sixteen or seventeen years old. People used to say, ‘If one of them were a woman they would marry each other.’ I remember those days very well. His relatives used to come riding in palanquins. Now he has a shop at Chanak. I sent for him many a time; he came here the other day and spent two days. Ram said he had no children; he brought his nephew, but the boy died. He told me this with a sigh; his eyes were filled with tears; he was grief-stricken for his nephew. He said further that since

they had no children of their own, all his wife's affection had been turned to the nephew. She was completely overwhelmed with grief. Ram said to her: 'You are crazy. What will you gain by grieving? Do you want to go to Benares?' You see, he called his wife crazy. Grief for the boy totally 'diluted' him. I found he had no stuff in him. I couldn't touch him.

In my boyhood days, while bathing in the Ganges, I saw a boy with a gold ornament around his waist. During my state of divine intoxication I had a desire to have a similar ornament myself. I was given one, but I couldn't keep it on very long. When I put it on, I felt within my body the painful up-rush of a current of air. It was because I had touched gold to my skin. I wore the ornament for a few moments and then had to put it aside. Otherwise I should have had to tear it off. My sister, Hriday's mother, used to worship my feet with flowers and sandal-paste. One day I placed my feet on her head and said to her, 'You will die in Benares.'

ARRIVAL AT CALCUTTA

Inauguration of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple

WHEN I WAS at Jhamapukur, I used to go frequently to the house of Kali and Bhulu, sons of Ramprasad Mitra as well as to that of Digambar Mitra. '

Brother (pointing to the eldest brother Ramkumar), what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart, getting which one is satisfied for ever.

The Rani (Rashmani) set a date and made all the arrangements for her journey to Varanasi. Nearly one hundred boats of different sizes were ready at the ghat, loaded with various objects. In a dream on the night before her departure, she received the divine command of the goddess. The Rani cancelled her pilgrimage and began to search for a suitable place to establish the temple.

There is a saying, 'The western bank of the Ganges is as holy as Varanasi.' With this in mind the Rani first tried to find land in the villages of Bally and Uttarpara on the west side of the Ganges, but she failed. The Rani offered enormous amounts of money, but out of petty jealousy the famous landlords of those places refused to sell land to her. Moreover, they even said that they would not bathe at a ghat on the Ganges if it was built by anyone else in their jurisdiction. So the Rani finally bought this place at Dakshineswar on the eastern bank of the Ganges.

Part of the land had belonged to an Englishman; the other part was an abandoned Muslim graveyard where a Muslim holy man had been buried. The

plot was in the shape of a tortoise shell, high in the centre and low around the edges. Such a burial ground, according to the Tantras, is a favourable site to establish Mother's temple and perform sadhana. As if guided by Providence the Rani selected this place.

From the day the making of the image of Kali was begun, the Rani practised severe austerities in accordance with the scriptures. She bathed three times a day, ate plain rice with clarified butter, slept on the floor, repeated a mantra, and performed worship according to her capacity. When the temple was completed and the image was ready, the Rani carefully considered an auspicious day for installation. The image was kept packed in a box lest it be broken. 'How long will you keep me confined in this way? I am suffering terribly. Install me as soon as possible.' As soon as she received this command, the Rani anxiously consulted the almanac to set an auspicious day for installing the deity. As there was no auspicious date before Snanyatra, she decided to perform the ceremony on that day.

I was greatly pained because I had to eat the food of a kaivarta. Even many poor beggars would not come to eat at the Kali temple of Rani Rashmani for that very reason. Because there were not enough people accepting that food, some days they fed cows the offered food and threw the rest into the Ganges.

A few days after the dedication of the temple at Dakshineswar, a madman came there who was really a sage endowed with the Knowledge of Brahman. He had a bamboo twig in one hand and a potted mango-plant in the other, and was wearing torn shoes. He didn't follow any social conventions. After bathing in the Ganges he didn't perform any religious rites. He ate something that he carried in a corner of his wearing cloth. Then he entered the Kali temple and chanted hymns to the Deity. The temple trembled. Haladhari was then in the shrine. The madman wasn't allowed to eat at the guesthouse, but he paid no attention to this slight. He searched for food in the rubbish heap where the dogs were eating crumbs from the discarded leaf-plates. Now and then he pushed the dogs aside to get his crumbs. The dogs didn't mind either. Haladhari followed him and asked: 'Who are you? Are you a purnajnani (a perfect knower of Brahman)?' The madman whispered, 'Ssh! Yes, I am a purnajnani.'

My heart began to palpitate as Haladhari told me about it. I clung to Hriday. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, shall I too have to pass through such a state?' We all went to see the man. He spoke words of great wisdom to us but behaved like a madman before others. Haladhari followed him a great way when he left the garden. After passing the gate he said to Haladhari: 'What else shall I say to you? When you no longer make any distinction between the water of this

pool and the water of the Ganges, then you will know that you have Perfect Knowledge.' Saying this he rapidly walked away.

I have no desire to be tied down to a job for life. In particular, if I agree to perform worship here (in the Kali temple), I'll be put in charge of the goddess's ornaments. This worries me. It is not possible to accept that responsibility. However, if you (pointing to Hriday) were to take the responsibility for the ornaments, I would then have no objection to performing the worship.

First four years of Sadhana

I MEDITATE under an amlaki tree in the jungle. The scriptures say that if a person meditates under an amlaki tree, whatever he desires is fulfilled.

What do you know? One should meditate by becoming free from all ties. From their very birth human beings are tied with eight fetters: hatred, shame, family status, good conduct, fear, fame, pride of caste, and ego. This sacred thread is a fetter because it signifies vain-glory: 'I am a brahmin and superior to all.' One should call on Mother with a one-pointed mind, shunning all bondage. That is why I took off those things. When I return after meditation, I shall put them on again,I would sit by the Ganges, with some coins and a heap of rubbish by niy side, and taking some coins in my right hand and a handful of rubbish in the left, I would tell my soul, 'My soul! This is what the world calls money, impressed with the queen's face. It has the power of bringing you rice and vegetables, of feeding the poor, of building houses, and all that the world calls great, but it can never help thee to realize the ever-existent knowledge and bliss, the Brahman. Regard it, therefore, as rubbish.' I lost all perception between the two in my mind, and threw them both into the Ganges. No wonder people took me for mad. But I was a little frightened. How foolish of me to offend the goddess of fortune! I thought, 'What shall I do if she doesn't provide me with food any more?' I said to the goddess, 'Mother, may you dwell in my heart.'

One idea by degrees filled my mind: 'Is there anything behind this image? Is it true that there is a Mother of Bliss in the universe? Is it true that She lives and guides this universe, or is it all dream? Is there any reality in religion?'

Day after day I would weep and say: 'Mother, is it true that Thou existest, or is it all poetry? Is the Blissful Mother an imagination of poets and misguided people, or is there such a Reality? Why dost Thou not speak? Art Thou dead?'

Mother, You showed Yourself to Ramprasad. Why won't You show Yourself to me? I don't want wealth, friends, and family, or objects of enjoyment. Please reveal Yourself to me.

Another day of this short life has gone and I have not known the Truth. Do

Thou manifest Thyself in me, Thou Mother of the Universe! See that I need Thee and nothing else.

There was an unbearable pain in my heart because I could not have a vision of Mother, Just as a man wrings out a towel with all his strength to get the water out of it, so I felt as if my heart were being wrung out. I began to think I should never see Mother. I was dying of despair. In my agony, I asked myself: ‘What’s the use of living this life?’

Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the Mother’s shrine. Like a madman, I ran to the sword and seized it. Then I had a marvellous vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. Afterwards what happened in the external world, or how that day and the next passed, T don’t know. But within me there was a steady flow of undiluted bliss that I had never before experienced, and I felt the immediate presence of the Divine Mother.

It was as if the room, doors, temple, and everything else vanished altogether; as if there were nothing anywhere! And what I saw was an infinite shoreless ocean of light; that ocean was consciousness. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming towards me to swallow me up. They were madly rushing towards me from all sides, with a terrific noise. Very soon they were upon me, and they pushed me down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness.

A torrent of spiritual light would come then, deluging my mind and urging me forward. I used to tell the Mother, ‘Mother, I could never learn from these erring men; but I will learn from Thee, and Thee alone.’

‘Mother, be gracious unto me. Reveal Yourself to me.’ I would cry so bitterly that people would gather around me to watch. I scarcely realized the presence of people around me. They looked more like shadows or painted pictures than real objects, and so I did not feel any shame or embarrassment at all. Sometimes I would lose outer consciousness from that unbearable agony. Immediately after that I would see the Mother’s luminous form bestowing boons and fearlessness! I used to see Her smiling, talking, consoling, or teaching me in various ways.

GOD-INTOXICATED STATE

SINCE THAT DAY I have been an altogether different man. I began to see another person within me. When I used to conduct the worship in the temple, my hand, instead of going toward the Deity, would very often come toward my head, and I would put flowers there. A young man who was staying with me did not dare approach me. He would say: ‘I see a light on your face. I am afraid to come very near you.’There is an image of Bhairava (a form of Shiva) in meditation on the

parapet of the natmandir in front of the Kali temple. While going to the temple to meditate, I would point to that image and tell my mind, ‘You must meditate on the Mother like that motionless statue.’ No sooner did I sit down to meditate than I would hear clattering sounds in all of my joints, beginning in my legs. It was as if someone inside me were turning keys to lock me up, joint by joint—I was powerless to move my body or change my posture, even slightly. I couldn’t stop meditating, or leave the temple, or do anything else I wanted, I was forced to sit in that posture until rny joints began clattering again and were unlocked, this time beginning at my neck and ending in my legs.

When I sat to meditate, at first I would see particles of light like swarms of fireflies. Sometimes I would see masses of light on all sides, covering everything like a mist; at other times I would see that everything was pervaded by bright waves of light like molten silver. I would see those things sometimes with eyes closed and sometimes with eyes open. I didn’t understand what I saw, nor did I know if it was good or bad to be having such visions. So I prayed anxiously to Mother: ‘I don’t understand what’s happening to me. I don’t know any mantras and incantations to call You. Please teach me how to know You. Mother, if You won’t teach me, who will? I have no refuge or guide except You.’ Thus I used to pray with a one-pointed mind and cry profusely with a longing heart.

I put my hand near the Mother’s nostrils and felt that She was actually breathing. At night I watched carefully, but in the lamp light I could never see Her shadow on the temple wall. From my room I would hear Mother running upstairs, as merry as a little girl, with Her anklets jingling. I would rush outside to see if this is true. And there She would be standing on the veranda of the second floor of the temple, with Her hair blowing in the breeze. Sometimes She would look towards Calcutta and sometimes towards the Ganges.

Sometimes I questioned myself: ‘What is happening to me? Am I on the right track? Mother, I don’t understand. Why am I in this situation? Please make me do what I am supposed to do and teach me what I am supposed to learn. Hold me close to You all the time.’

When I performed spiritual disciplines and worship according to scriptural directions, I used to think that the ‘papa-purusha’ (evil spirit) within me had been burnt. Who knew then that a papa-purusha dwells in every human body, and that it could be truly burnt and destroyed? In the beginning of sadhana I felt a burning sensation in my body. I thought, ‘What kind of disease is this?’ Gradually it increased in severity until it became unbearable. I applied various medicated oils, but to no avail. Later on, I was seated in the Panchavati one day when suddenly I saw a terrible-looking, red-eyed man of black complexion come out of this body (pointing to himself) and begin to stumble about in front of me

like a drunkard. The next moment I saw a handsome person emerge from this body, wearing an ochre cloth and holding a trident in his hand. He vehemently attacked the terrible person and killed him, and from that point on the burning sensation diminished. Prior to this I had suffered from that burning continually for six months.

During my sadhana I was in a God-intoxicated state. One day, while I was picking grass sitting under the Panchavati in Dakshineswar, a beautiful young woman came and stood behind me, trying to draw my attention. I was unaware of her presence. After waiting for a long time, she felt neglected and said to me: 'Hello, sadhu, I have been standing behind you for a long time—neither did you look at me nor talk to me. I have visited many ashramas. Wherever I went, everyone eagerly talked to me or asked me to stay in the ashrama. You are a wonderful detached monk. You didn't look at me even once!'

One day, in that state of intoxication, I went to the bathing ghat on the Ganges at Baranagore. There I saw Jay Mukherji repeating the name of God; but his mind was on something else. I went up and slapped him twice on the cheeks.

At one time Rani Rashmani was staying in the temple garden. She came to the shrine of the Divine Mother, as she frequently did when I worshipped Kali, and asked me to sing a song or two. On this occasion, while I was singing, I noticed she was sorting the flowers for worship absent-mindedly.(She was deeply thinking about the possible result of a pending lawsuit) At once I slapped her on the cheeks, (saying, "Shame on you to think such thoughts even here!") She became quite embarrassed and sat there with folded hands. Alarmed at this state of mind myself, I said to my cousin Haladhari: 'Just see my nature! How can I get rid of it?' After praying to the Divine Mother for some time with great yearning, I was able to shake off this habit.

In those days whatever desire arose in my mind would come to pass. I planted a tulsi-grove in the Panchavati in order to practise japa and meditation. I wanted very much to fence it around with bamboo sticks. Soon afterwards a bundle of bamboo sticks and some string were carried by the flood-tide of the Ganges right in front of the Panchavati, A temple servant noticed them.

At first I practised sadhana in the Panchavati. Sometimes I cried with a longing heart, 'Mother! Mother!'Or again, 'Rama! Rama!'

As I was perfectly unmindful of the cleaning of the body at that time, the hairs grew long and got matted of themselves, being smeared with dirt and dust. When I would sit in meditation, the body would become stiff and motionless like a stock, through intense concentration of mind, and birds, taking it to be an inert substance, came and freely perched on the head, pecked into the matted hair in search of food.

I did not once look to the preservation of my body. My nephew, Hriday used to bring me some food daily, and some days succeeded and some days did not succeed in forcing a few mouthfuls down my throat, though I had no idea of it. Sometimes, I used to go to the closet of the servants and sweepers and clean it with my own hand, and prayed, ‘Mother, destroy in me all idea that I am great, and that I am a brahmin, and that they are low and pariahs, for who are they but Thee in so many forms?’

Sometimes I used to weep so intensely the pangs of separation from God, that in great bitterness I rubbed my face in the earth; often I used to get cut and bleed. In meditation, prayer and other devotional practices, the day used to fly by so quickly that I was not conscious of it. At dusk, when the approach of night was announced by the ringing of bells and the blowing of the conch from the temple, I used to be reminded that the day had passed and the evening had set in. With this consciousness a frenzy of despair would seize my soul and I would throw myself on the ground and rub my face on it, crying out loudly, ‘Mother, another day has passed and still you have not appeared before me.’ People would say, ‘He is suffering from colic; that is why he is crying so terribly.’

Spiritual discipline is necessary in order to see God. I had to pass through very severe discipline. How many austerities I practised under the bel-tree! I would lie down under it, crying to the Divine Mother, ‘O Mother, reveal Thyself to me.’ The tears would flow down in torrents and soak my body.

Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: ‘O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedanta. Reveal to me what is in the Purana and the Tantra.’ One by one She has revealed all these to me. Yes, She has taught me everything. Oh, how many things She has shown me!

Once I thought that the divine visions I had had during ecstasy and the commands I had received were all false. The Mother must have cheated me! I was extremely upset. Piqued, I cried to the Mother: ‘Mother, I am unlettered and ignorant. Why have You cheated me in this way?’ I couldn’t control myself, and kept crying. I was in a room of the *kuthi.* After a while a smoke-like mist arose from the floor and covered some space before me. Then I saw within it a golden-complexioned, living, calm face with long flowing beard. That figure looked at me intently and said in a deep voice: ‘My child, you remain in bhava mukha. You remain in bhava mukha. You remain in bhava mukha.’

Haladhari’s words raised doubt in my mind at another time. So while performing worship in the temple, I cried and pressed the Mother to solve that matter. At that time the Mother, in the guise of a woman known as ‘Rati’s mother’, appeared beside the consecrated pitcher (installed in front of the image) and told me: ‘You remain in bhava mukha!’

Oh, what a state I passed through! At that time I didn't eat my meals here. I would enter the house of a brahmin in the village or at Baranagore or at Ariadaha. Generally it would be past mealtime. I would just sit down there without saying a word. If the members of the household asked me why I had come, I would simply say, 'I want something to eat.' Now and then I would go, uninvited of course, to Ram Chatterji's house at Alambazar or to the Choudhurys at Dakshineswar. But I didn't relish the food at the Choudhurys' house. And I was twenty-two or twenty-three when the Divine Mother one day asked me in the Kali temple, 'Do you want to be Akshara?' I didn't know what the word meant. I asked Haladhari about it. He said, 'Kshara means jiva, living being; Akshara means Paramatman, the Supreme Soul.'

It is not necessary for all to practise great austerity. But I went through great suffering. I used to lie on ground with my head resting on a mound for a pillow. I hardly noticed the passing of the days. I only called on God and wept, 'O Mother! O Mother!'

A few days after my first experience of the God-intoxicated state at Dakshineswar, a lady of a brahmin family arrived there. She had many good traits. No sooner was a garland put round her neck and incense burnt before her than she went into samadhi. A few moments later she experienced great bliss; tears streamed from her eyes. I saluted her and said, 'Mother, shall I succeed?' 'Yes', she replied.

It is the Divine Mother who exists in the form of the universe and pervades everything as Consciousness. The earthly mother gives birth to this body. I used to go into samadhi uttering the word 'Ma'. While repeating the word I would draw the Mother of the Universe to me, as it were, like the fisherman casting their net and after a while drawing it in. When they draw in the net they find big fish in it.

Oh, what a state of mind I passed through! I would open my mouth, touching, as it were, heaven and the nether world with my jaws, and utter the word 'Ma'. I felt that I had seized the Mother, like a fisherman dragging fish in his net. I used to pray to Her in this way: 'O Mother! O Blissful One! Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must!' Again, I would say to Her: 'O Lord of the lowly! O Lord of the universe! Surely I am not outside Thy universe. I am bereft of knowledge. I am without discipline. I have no devotion. I know nothing. Thou must be gracious and reveal Thyself to me.'

Mother, in one form Thou art in the street, and in another form Thou art the Universe. I salute Thee, Mother, I salute Thee.

I used to cry for God all alone, with a longing heart. I used to weep, 'O God, where art Thou?' Weeping thus, I would lose all consciousness of the world. My

mind would merge in the Mahavayu.

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water-vessels were Consciousness, the door-sill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness—all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss— the Bliss of Satchidananda. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him also I saw the Power of the Divine Mother vibrating.

That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that the Divine Mother Herself had become everything—even the cat. The manager of the temple garden wrote to Mathur Babu saying that I was feeding the cat with the offering intended for the Divine Mother. But Mathur Babu had insight into the state of my mind. He wrote back to the manager: ‘Let him do whatever he likes. You must not say anything to him.’

How many other visions I saw while meditating during my sadhana! Once I was meditating under the bel-tree when ‘Sin’ appeared before me and tempted me in various ways. He came to me in the form of an English soldier. He wanted to give me wealth, honour, sex pleasure, various occult powers, and such things. I began to pray to the Divine Mother. Now I am telling you something very secret. The Mother appeared. I said to Her, ‘Kill him, Mother!’ I still remember that form of the Mother, Her world-bewitching beauty. She came to me taking the form of Krishnamayi (the younger daughter of Balaram Bose). But it was as if her glance moved the world.

How many visions I saw! But I am not permitted to tell them. Someone is shutting my mouth, as it were.

One day when I was meditating, seated in the Kali temple, I could not bring the Mother’s form to my mind at all. Then I saw that She had appeared in the form of Ramani, a prostitute who came to bathe at the Dakshineswar ghat, and was peeping from behind the water-pot before the image. I laughed and said: ‘O Mother, you have a desire to become Ramani today! All right. Accept my worship today in this form.’ Thus, She made me understand: ‘I am also the prostitute. There is none other than Me.’ Another day while passing through Mechuabazar Street by carriage, I saw Her in the form of a prostitute. She was dressed nicely, wore jewellery and a small ornament on her forehead, and her hair was braided. Standing on a veranda, She was smoking tobacco from a gold-plated hubble-bubble and enticing passers-by with her charms. Surprised, I exclaimed: ‘Mother, here You are in this form!’ Saying so, I bowed down to Her.

When I first attained this exalted state I could not worship Mother Kali or give Her the food offering. Haladhari and Hriday told me that on account of this the temple officer had slandered me. But I only laughed; I wasn't in the least angry.

I used to shut the doors of my room when I saw worldly people coming.

To my Divine Mother I prayed only for pure love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and prayed to Her: 'Mother, here is Thy virtue, here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love. Here is Thy knowledge, here is Thy ignorance. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma, here is Thy adharma. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love for Thee. I didn't ask even for knowledge for public recognition. I could not say: 'Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both.' I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth.

When one renounces both dharma and adharma, there remains only pure love of God—love that is stainless, motiveless, and that one feels only for the sake of love.

The Mother reveals to me that She Herself has become everything. One day I was coming from the pine-grove toward the Panchavati. A dog followed me. I stood still for a while near the Panchavati. The thought came to my mind that the Mother might say something to me through that dog, I visited the museum once. I was shown fossils. A whole animal has become stone! Just see what an effect has been produced by company! Likewise, by constantly living in the company of a holy man one verily becomes holy.

The Divine Mother has taken away my sandhya and other devotions. The purpose of the sandhya is to purify body and mind. I am no longer in that state. After attaining samadhi, I once went to the Ganges to perform tarpan. But as I took water in the palm of my hand, it trickled down through my fingers. Weeping, I said to Haladhari, 'Cousin, what is this?' Haladhari replied, 'It is called galitahasta in the holy books.' After the vision of God, such duties as the performance of tarpan drop away.

One day as I was passing the Panchavati on my way to the pine grove, I heard a bullfrog croaking. I thought it must have been seized by a snake. After some time, as I was coming back, I could still hear its terrified croaking. I looked to see what was the matter, and found that a water-snake had seized it. The snake could neither swallow it nor give it up. So there was no end to the frog's suffering. I thought that had it been seized by a cobra it would have been silenced after three croaks at the most. As it was only a water-snake, both of them had to go through this agony.

While repeating the name of Rama, I sometimes assumed the attitude of Hanuman. By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I didn't feign them; they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth round the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, 'Raghuvir!' My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, my coccyx enlarged by about an inch. It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of mind had passed on the completion of that course of discipline. In short, everything about me was more like a monkey than that of a human being.

One day at that time I was seated under the Panchavati. I was in a state of ordinary consciousness, well aware of my surroundings. All of a sudden, a luminous female figure of exquisite grace appeared before me. Her radiance lit up everything around her. I could see her, and at the same time I could see the trees and plants of the Panchavati, the Ganges, everything. I saw that she was human, for she had no marks of a divine being upon her, such as a third eye. But the sublime qualities reflected in her face—love, sorrow, compassion, and fortitude—are seldom to be seen even among goddesses. Slowly she advanced towards me, from the direction of the north, all the while looking at me with gracious eyes. I was amazed. I was wondering who she might be when suddenly a monkey uttered a cry, fell at her feet, and rolled on the ground. Then it came to me in a flash that this must be Sita, the daughter of King Janaka, who had suffered so greatly all her life, and whose whole life had been devoted to her husband, Rama. Overcome by emotion, I cried out 'Mother' and was about to fall at her feet when she instantly passed my body and became merged in it. Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, I fell unconscious on the ground. This was the first vision I ever had with my eyes wide open, and when I wasn't meditating. Is it because my first vision of Sita was of her grief-stricken aspect that my subsequent life contained so much suffering? Who knows!

When I was passing through the state of dasya (the attitude of the servant toward his master), someone, in order to test me and also for curing my madness, brought a prostitute into my room. She was beautiful to look at, with pretty eyes. I cried, 'O Mother! O Mother!' and rushed out of the room. I told Haladhari and everyone else about this woman. While in that state I used to weep with the name of the Mother on my lips. Weeping, I said to Her: 'O Mother, protect me! Please make me stainless. Please see that my mind is not diverted from the Real to the unreal.'

I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything—her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama.

Oh, what an ecstatic state it was! Even the slightest suggestion would awaken my spiritual consciousness. I worshipped the ‘Beautiful’ in a girl fourteen years old. I saw that she was the personification of the Divine Mother. At the end of the worship I bowed before her and offered a rupee at her feet. One day I witnessed a Ramlila performance. I saw the performers to be the actual Sita, Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Vibhishana. Then I worshipped the actors and actresses who played those parts. At that time I used to invite maidens here and worship them. I found them to be the embodiments of the Divine Mother Herself.

One day I saw a woman in blue standing near the bakul-tree. She was a prostitute. But she instantly kindled in me the vision of Sita. I forgot the woman. I saw that it was Sita herself on her way to meet Rama after her rescue from Ravana in Ceylon. For a long time I remained in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world. Another day I had gone to the Maidan in Calcutta for fresh air. A great crowd had assembled there to watch a balloon ascension. Suddenly I saw an English boy leaning against a tree. As he stood there his body was bent in three places. The vision of Krishna came before me in a flash. I went into Samadhi.

A young monk exactly resembling me would come out of my body and instruct me in all matters. Sometimes when he would emerge from me I would have a little outer consciousness; at other times I would lose it altogether and become inert. I would watch his movements and listen to him speak. The Brahmani and Tota Puri only reiterated the spiritual teachings that I had heard from him. They taught me what I had already learned. It seems that they came into my life as gurus in order that respect for the injunctions of the scriptures would be maintained. No other purpose can be found for my acceptance of Tota Puri and others as gurus.

At Dakshineswar I was initiated into the mystery of Rama worship. I painted my forehead with a long mark and put on a string with a diamond round my neck. But after a few days I gave them up.

He who came as Rama and as Krishna has come now in this body (pointing to himself). As the king sometimes disguises himself to visit the capital, so this time He has come secretly to the world.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND DIVINE ECSTASY

ONCE, WHEN I was seriously ill, I was taken to the physician Gangaprasad Sen. He said to me: ‘I shall give you a medicine, but you mustn’t drink any water. You may take pomegranate juice.’ Everyone wondered how I could live without water; but I was determined not to drink it. I said to myself: ‘I am a Paramahansa and not a goose. I shall drink only milk.’’

One day while we were at Gangaprasad’s house, he was concerned because the treatment was not having the expected result. He examined me carefully and prescribed new medicines. A physician from East Bengal was also present. Hearing of the symptoms of the disease, he remarked: ‘It seems to me the patient’s condition is due to divine ecstasy. It is a yogic condition and is not curable by medicine.’ This physician was the first person who was able to diagnose the real cause of my physical problems, which appeared as a disease. But no one believed his words then.

An ordinary man could not have borne a quarter of that tremendous spiritual fervour; it would have burnt him up. I could forget my indescribable pangs only by seeing the Mother in some form or other for the greater part of the day and night. Otherwise this body could not have survived. I had no sleep for six long years. My eyes lost the ability to blink. Despite repeated efforts, I could not close my eyelids. I had no idea of time. I almost forgot that I needed to maintain my body. When at rare intervals my attention would fall on the body a little, I was frightened by its condition. I thought, ‘Am I on the verge of insanity?’ Standing in front of a mirror, I tried to close my eyelids with my fingers—and I couldn’t! I became frightened and tearfully said to the Mother: ‘Mother, is this the result of praying and wholly surrendering myself to You? Now You have given me this terrible disease!’ But the next moment I would say: ‘Let it be as You wish. Let this body go to pieces, but don’t leave me. Reveal Yourself to me; bestow Your mercy on me. I have taken refuge at Your lotus feet alone. I have none else but You.’ I would shed tears, then suddenly be filled with ecstasy. I would feel my body to be a trifling thing. I was comforted when I saw the Mother and heard Her reassuring voice.

No sooner was one state transcended than another took its place. Before that whirlwind, the sacred thread was blown away. Not only that, even the wearing cloth hardly remained. Oh, through what states of mind I passed in those days. Everyone thought I was mad. A slight stimulus from outside stirred the depths of my spiritual consciousness. Even a street girl appeared to me as Sita going to greet her victorious husband. At one time 1 would roam in the temple premises with a bamboo on my shoulder. At another time I would feed a dog and eat the

leavings. The idea of caste lost all meaning for me. A low-caste man sent me a curry cooked by his wife, which I ate with relish.

At one time I believed that I had conquered lust. Then one day when I was seated in the Panchavati, I suddenly had such an onrush of lust that it was hard for me to maintain control! Immediately I began crying, rubbing my face in the dust, and saying to the Divine Mother: 'I have made a big mistake, Mother. I shall never again think that I have conquered lust.' Only then did it subside.

Is it an easy matter to get rid of lust? I myself felt a queer sensation in my heart six months after I had begun my spiritual practice. Then I threw myself on the ground under a tree and wept bitterly. I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, if it comes to that, I shall certainly cut my throat with a knife!' I have completely surrendered myself to the Mother, so She is holding my hand all the time. She never allows me to take a false step.

I began to perceive God in all beings. Formal worship dropped away. I used to go to the bel-tree to pluck its leaves. One day, as I plucked a leaf, a bit of the bark came off. I found the tree full of consciousness. I felt grieved because I had hurt the tree. One day I tried to pluck some durva grass, but I found I couldn't do it very well. Then I forced myself to pluck it. One day I was about to gather some flowers. They were everywhere on the trees. At once I had a vision of Virat; it appeared that His worship was just over. The flowers looked like a bouquet placed on the head of the Deity. I could not pluck them.

How many things I saw during meditation! I vividly perceived before me a heap of rupees, a shawl, a plate of sweets, and two women with rings in their noses. 'What do you want?' I asked my mind. 'Do you want to enjoy any of these things?' No,' replied the mind, 'I don't want any of them. I don't want anything but the Lotus Feet of God.' I saw the inside and the outside of the women, as one sees from outside the articles in a glass room. I saw what is in them: entrails, blood, filth, worms, phlegm and such things.

Once, when I was in a God-intoxicated state, I was asked to go to the manager of the Kali temple to sign the receipt for my salary. They all do it here. But I said to the manager: 'I cannot do that. I am not asking for any salary. You may give it to someone else if you want.' I am the servant of God alone. Whom else shall I serve? Mallick noticed the late hours of my meals and arranged for a cook. He gave me one rupee for a month's expenses. That embarrassed me. I had to run to him whenever he sent for me. It would have been quite a different thing if I had gone to him of my own accord.

ARRIVAL OF BHAIRAVI BRAHMANI

& TANTRA SADHANA

(POINTING TO BHAIRAVI Brahmani) Mother, what are these things (burning sensation, sleeplessness, and other physical symptoms) that keep happening to me? Am I mad, really? Have I truly developed this disease by wholeheartedly calling on the Divine Mother? (on eating the food offered by Brahmani to her Chosen Deity Raghuvir) Who knows, Mother, why I lose control over myself and do such things?'

She (referring to Brahmani) says that all the signs of the avatars are in this body *(pointing to himself).* She is well versed in the scriptures and she has many books with her.

About this time, I felt such a burning sensation all over my body; I used to stand in the waters of the Ganges, with my body immersed up to shoulders and a wet towel over my head all through the day, for it was insufferable. Then brahmani came and cured me of it in three days. She smeared my body with sandal-wood paste and put garlands on my neck, and the pain vanished in three days.

During the day the Brahmani would travel to various places far away from the temple and collect rare articles prescribed by Tantra. At nightfall she would set up the ritual either under the bel tree or under the Panchavati, then call me to worship the Divine Mother with those articles, advising me to be absorbed in japa and meditation. But I could seldom do japa after worship because my mind was so absorbed that I would merge into samadhi while turning the rosary. I would truly experience the result of that rite, as described by the scriptures. Thus I had vision after vision and innumerable wonderful experiences. The Brahmani made me practise all the sixty-four sadhanas prescribed in the Vishnukranta section of the Tantra, one after the other. Those were difficult practices; most aspirants fall while practising them. But I got through them successfully by the Mother's grace.

One night the Brahmani brought a beautiful young woman from somewhere and arranged the worship. She put the woman on the Devi's seat, then instructed me, 'My child, worship her as the goddess.' I was seized with fear, wept piteously, and said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, why do You give this command to one who has taken refuge in You? Does Your weak child have the power to withstand such a severe trial?' As soon as I said that, my heart was filled with divine strength. Like a hypnotized person, not knowing what I was doing, I repeated the mantra, sat on the woman's lap, and immediately went into samadhi. When I regained outer consciousness, the Brahmani said: 'You have completed the rite, my child. Under such circumstances, others restrain

themselves with great difficulty and finish by repeating the mantra for a very short time. But you entered samadhi, losing body consciousness completely!' When I heard this I was reassured. With a grateful heart I bowed down to the Divine Mother again and again for enabling me to withstand the ordeal.

At that time my beauty became manifest in such a way that people would stare at me. My face and chest were always crimson, and a lustre would emanate from my body. Because people stared at me, I would cover myself with a thick chadar (shawl). I would pray to the Divine Mother, 'Take away my external beauty, O Mother, and give me inner beauty.' I used to pass my hand over the body and slap it again and again, saying, 'Go within, go within.' After some days my skin turned pale.

During my sadhana I was seized with a ravenous appetite that no amount of food could satisfy. No sooner had I eaten something than 1 would feel hungry again. Day and night my mind was possessed by one thought alone: what to eat. I pondered, 'What kind of disease is this?' When I described it to the Brahmani, she replied: 'My son, don't worry. The scriptures explain that those who advance on the path of spirituality pass through such abnormal states. Wait, I shall cure it.' She asked Mathur to supply various kinds of food— from flattened rice and sugar-coated parched rice to sandesh, rasagolla, luchi, and other delicacies—and stack it all in a room. She then told me, 'My son, stay in this room day and night and eat whenever and whatever you like.' I remained in that room and walked around, touching different foods. Every now and then, I would taste one item or another, according to my fancy. In this way three days passed, that strange hunger and desire for food left me, and I was relieved.

I had direct visions of those things. One day I was passing back of the *kuthi* when my whole body burst into flames, as it were, like the fire in a home.

My joy after that experience was equal to the pain I suffered before it. Mahabhava is a divine ecstasy; it shakes the body and mind to their very foundation. It is like a huge elephant entering a small hut. The house shakes to its foundation. Perhaps it falls to pieces. The burning pain that one feels when one is separated from God is not an ordinary feeling. I was unconscious three days in that state, I couldn't move. I lay in one place. When I regained consciousness, the Brahmani took me out for a bath. Her hand couldn't bear the touch of my skin; so my body had to be covered with a heavy sheet. Only then could she hold me with her hand and lead me to the bathing-place. The earth that had stuck to my body while I was lying on the ground had become baked. In that state I felt as if a ploughshare were passing through my backbone. I cried out: 'Oh, I am dying! I am dying!' But afterwards I was filled with great joy.

The Vedanta speaks of seven planes, in all of which the sadhaka has a

particular kind of vision. The human mind has a natural tendency to confine its activities to the three lower centres—the highest being opposite the naval—and therefore is content with the satisfaction of the common appetites such as eating and so forth. But when it reaches the fourth centre, that is, the one opposite the heart, the man sees a divine effulgence. From this state, however, he often lapses back to the three lower centres. When the mind comes to the fifth centre, opposite the throat, the sadhaka cannot speak of anything but of God. While I was in this state I would feel as though struck violently on the head if anybody spoke of worldly topics before me. I would hide myself in the Panchavati where I was safe. I would fly at the sight of worldly-minded people, and relatives appeared to me like a yawning chasm from which there was no escape if I once fell. I felt suffocated in their presence—almost to the point of death, and would be relieved only when I left them. Even from this position a man may slip down. So he has to be on his guard. But he is above all fear when his mind reaches the sixth centre—opposite the junction of the eyebrows. He gets the vision of the Paramatman and remains always in samadhi. There is only a thin transparent veil between this and the Sahasrara or the highest centre. He is then so near the Paramatman that he imagines he is merged in Him. But really he is not. From this state the mind can come down to the fifth, or at the most, to fourth centre, but not below that. The ordinary sadhakas, classed as ‘jivas’ cannot come down from this state. After remaining constantly in samadhi for twenty-one days, they break that thin veil and become one with the Lord for ever. This eternal union of the jiva and the Paramatman in the Sahasrara is known as going into the seventh plane.

A man’s spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his Kundalini is aroused. The Kundalini dwells in the Muladhara. When it is aroused, it passes along the Sushumna nerve, goes through the centres of Svadhisthana, Manipura, and so on, and at last reaches the head. This is called the movement of the Mahavayu, the spiritual current. It culminates in samadhi. One’s spiritual consciousness is not awakened by the mere reading of books. One should also pray to God. The Kundalini is aroused if the aspirant feels restless for God. To talk of knowledge from mere study and hearsay! What will that accomplish?

Just before attaining this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the Kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centres blossom forth, and how all these culminates in samadhi. This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me, enter the Sushumna nerve and commune with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. He began with the centre at the anus and passed through the centres at the sexual

organ, naval, and so on. The different lotuses of those centres—four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled, and so forth—had been dropping.

At his touch they stood erect. When he reached the heart—I distinctly remember it—and communed with the lotus there, touching it with his tongue, the twelve-petalled lotus, which was hanging head down, stood erect and opened its petals. Then he came to the sixteen-pctalled lotus in the throat and the two-petalled lotus in the forehead. And last of all, the thousand-pctalled lotus in the head blossomed. Since then I have been in this state.

VATSALYA BHAVA SADHANA

MANY SADHUS, ASCETICS, all-renouncing monks, and Vaishnava anchorites would visit this place. They stopped coming this way as much when the railroad was constructed. But prior to that, all the holy men would pass by as they travelled the road alongside the Ganges on their way to bathe in the Gangasagar or to visit the Lord Jagannath in Puri. They would invariably stop for a few days at Rashmani's temple garden, setting up their tents for rest. Some of them would stay longer. Do you know why? Monks do not set up camp in a place that lacks facilities for food and water, and is not close to a secluded jungle where they can answer the call of nature. Monks live on alms, so they set up their dwellings where alms are easily available.

Food was available in Rashmani's temple garden, and by the grace of Mother Ganges there was no scarcity of water. Furthermore, there was a secluded jungle nearby for answering the call of nature. So monks would set up their tents here. At particular times, certain types of monks would gather here in large numbers. Once the great Paramahansa sannyasins began to come. They were not like vagabond mendicants looking for food.

Many days passed. Gradually, the visits of the Paramahansa monks became fewer. The Ramait babajis then began to come in groups. They were wonderful monks—devout and full of renunciation. Ah, what devotion and faith they had! How steadfastly did they serve the Lord! It was from one of them that Ramlala came to me.

That Babaji (Jatadhari) served the image of Ramlala for many years. He carried his deity wherever he went. Whatever he got by begging he would cook and offer to him. Not only that, he actually saw Ramlala eating, or demanding something to eat, or wanting to go for a walk, or childishly asking for something, and so on. Jatadhari was absorbed in serving Ramlala and overwhelmed with joy. I also saw Ramlala acting like that. I stayed with Jatadhari for almost the whole day and watched Ramlala.

As the days passed, I felt that Ramlala loved me more and more. As long as I remained with Jatadhari, Ramlala was happy and playful. But whenever I left and went to my own room, he followed me there at once. He wouldn't remain with Jatadhari, even though I ordered him not to come with me. I thought at first that this must be an illusion. For how could the deity whom Jatadhari had worshipped for so long with such devotion love me more than him? But it was not my imagination. I actually saw Ramlala as I see you—now dancing ahead of me, now following me. Sometimes he insisted on being taken on my lap. But then when I picked him up, he wouldn't want to stay there. He would run around in the sun, plucking flowers among the thorns, or splashing and swimming in the Ganges. I told him over and over again: 'Don't do that, my child. You'll get blisters on the soles of your feet, if you run in the sun. You'll catch cold and fever if you stay in the water so long.' But he never listened to my words, however much I warned him. He'd go right on with his pranks. Sometimes he'd look at me sweetly with his beautiful eyes, or he'd pout and make faces at me. Then I'd get really angry and scold him, 'Just you wait, you rascal,' I'd tell him, 'I'll give you a big thrashing today. I'll pound your bones into powder.' I'd pull him out of the water or the sun and try to tempt him with some gift to stay and play inside the room. If he went on being naughty, I'd give him a couple of slaps. But when I did that he'd pout and look at me with tears in his eyes, and I'd feel such pain that I'd take him on my lap and comfort him. All these things actually happened.

One day, when I was going to bathe in the Ganges, he insisted on coming with me. What could I do? I had to let him. But then he wouldn't come out of the water. I begged him to, but he wouldn't listen. At last I got angry and I dunked him, saying, 'All right—stay in as long as you like!' While I was doing this, I actually saw him gasping and struggling for breath! 'What am I doing?' I thought to myself in dismay. I pulled him out of the water and took him in my arms.

I can't describe how greatly another incident pained me and how bitterly I wept because of it. On that day Ramlala kept asking me for something to eat, and all I had to give him was some coarse parched rice that wasn't properly husked. As he was eating it, the husks scratched his delicate, tender tongue. I felt so sorry! I took him on my lap and exclaimed: 'Your mother Kaushalya used to feed you cream and butter with the greatest care, and I've been so thoughtless, giving you the coarse food!'

On some days Jatadhari would cook food to offer Ramlala, but couldn't find him. Then he would come running in distress in my room, and there Ramlala would be playing on the floor. Jatadhari's feelings were terribly hurt. He'd scold

Ramlala, saying: ‘I took so much trouble to cook food for you. I looked all over the place—and here you were, all the time! You don’t care about me. You have forgotten everything. And that’s how you always are. You do just as you please. You have no kindness or affection. You left your parents and went into the forest. Your poor father died of a broken heart, and you never even came back to show yourself to him on his deathbed!’ Talking like this, Jatadhari would drag Ramlala back to his own room and feed him. Thus, the days rolled on. Jatadhari stayed on at Dakshineswar for a long time, because Ramlala didn’t want to go away and leave me. And Jatadhari couldn’t bear to leave Ramlala behind, having loved him for so long.

Then one day Jatadhari came to me, crying with joy, and said: ‘Ramlala has revealed himself to me in a way that I have never known before but have always longed for. Now the desire of my life is fulfilled. Ramlala says he won’t go away from here; he doesn’t want to leave you. But I’m not sad about it anymore. He lives happily with you and plays joyfully, and I am full of bliss when I see him this way. I have learned now to be happy simply in his happiness, so I can now leave him with you and go away. I will enjoy knowing that he is happy with you.’ Then Jatadhari gave me the image of Ramlala and said good-bye. And Ramlala has been here ever since.

MADHURA BHAVA SADHANA

UNLESS ONE is free of lust, one cannot understand Radha, the embodiment of mahabhava. When the gopis saw Satchidananda Krishna, they would lose body-consciousness as they experienced bliss a million times more intense than sexual union. Could the thought of trivial sensual pleasure arise then in their minds? The divine lustre of Krishna’s body would touch them, making them experience more ecstasy in every pore of their bodies than sexual pleasure could ever give them!.

It is impossible to describe the incomparable, pure, heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha, who renounced everything out of her passionate love for Krishna. Her complexion was light yellow like stamens of nagakeshara *(mesua ferra)* flower.

Oh, what a state I passed through! I passed some days absorbed in Shiva and Durga, some days absorbed in Radha and Krishna, and some days absorbed in Sita and Rama. Assuming Radha’s attitude, I would cry for Krishna, and assuming Sita’s attitude, I would cry for Rama. Sometimes, when the mind descended to the Lila, I would meditate day and night on Sita and Rama. At those times I would constantly behold the forms of Sita and Rama. Again, I used

to be absorbed in the ideal of Radha and Krishna and would constantly see their forms. Or again, I would be absorbed in the ideal of Gauranga. He is the harmonization of two ideals: the Purusha and the Prakriti. At such times I would always see the form of Gauranga. Then a change came over me. The mind left the plane of the Lila and ascended to the Nitya. I no longer enjoyed seeing the forms of God; I said to myself, ‘They come and go.’ I lifted my mind above them. I removed all the pictures of gods and goddesses from my room and began to meditate on the Primal Purusha, the indivisible Satchidananda, regarding myself His handmaid.

For many days I cherished the feeling that I was a handmaid and a companion of the Divine Mother. I used to say: ‘I am the handmaid of Brahmamayi, the Blissful Mother. O companions of the Divine Mother, make me the Mother’s handmaid! I shall go about proudly, saying, ‘1 am Brahmamayi’s handmaid!’

At that time I used to wear skirts and ornaments like a woman. With the scarf on I used to perform the evening worship before the image. I put on a nose-ring. One can conquer lust by assuming the attitude of a woman. One must worship the Adyashakti. She must be propitiated. She alone has assumed all female forms.

At that time I was almost unconscious of the outer world. Mathur kept me at his Janbazar mansion a few days. While living there I regarded myself as the handmaid of the Divine Mother. The ladies of the house didn’t feel at all bashful with me. They felt as free before me as women feel before a small boy or girl. I used to escort Mathur’s daughter to her husband’s chamber with the maidservant.

At that time Mathur’s daughters considered me a female confidante of theirs and did not feel at all uncomfortable.

The devotional scriptures say that when nineteen kinds of bhava (emotion or mood) for God manifest together in one person, it is called mahabhava. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to practise one bhava before he achieves perfection in it. All nineteen spiritual emotions are fully manifested here (pointing to his own body).

The worship of Shakti is extremely difficult. It is no joke. I passed two years as the handmaid and companion of the Divine Mother. But my natural attitude has always been that of a child toward its mother. I regard the breasts of any woman as those of my own mother. Women are, all of them, the veritable images of Shakti.

The Bhagavata, the devotee, and God—these three are one and the One manifests as three.

ARRIVAL OF TOTA PURI (NANGTA) AND VEDANTA SADHANA

ONCE I FELL into the clutches of a jnani (referring to Tota Puri, the Naked One), who made me listen to Vedanta for eleven months.

(Pointing to Tota Puri) I don't know what to do or not to do. My Mother knows everything. If She commands it, then I will undertake the practice.

After initiating me into sannyasa, the Naked One began to teach me various established truths of Vedanta and asked me to withdraw my mind from all objects and dive into the Atman. But despite all my attempts, during meditation I could not cross the realm of name and form and bring my mind to the unconditioned state. I had no difficulty in withdrawing my mind from all objects except one: the all-too-familiar form of the Blissful Mother, radiant with Pure Consciousness that appeared before me as a living reality and prevented me from passing beyond the realm of name and form. For more than three days this happened again and again when I tried to meditate according to the instructions of Vedanta. I almost lost hope of reaching nirvikalpa samadhi. I opened my eyes and told the Naked One; No, it can't be done. I cannot raise my mind to the unconditioned state and force it to be absorbed in the Atman.' Irritated, the Naked One said sharply: 'What do you mean—can't be done? It must be done!' Then he looked around the hut and found a bit of broken glass. He picked it up and stuck its needle-sharp point between my eyebrows and said, 'Fix the mind here.' I sat down to meditate again, firmly determined. As soon as the form of the Divine Mother appeared in my mind, I used my discrimination as a sword of knowledge and with it mentally cut that form into two. Then all distinctions disappeared from my mind, and it swiftly soared beyond the realm of name and form. I lost myself in samadhi.

At the sight of my samadhi under the madhavi vine, he was quite taken aback and exclaimed, 'Ah! What is this?' Then he came to know who resides in this body. He said to me, 'Please let me go.' At these words I went into an ecstatic mood and said, 'You cannot go till I realize the Truth of Vedanta.' Day and night I lived with him. We talked only Vedanta.

But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Once I sang of Her for Nangta at the Panchavati: 'To arms! To arms, O man! Death storms your house in battle array.' I sang another: 'O Mother, I have no one else to blame: Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug.' Nangta, the Vedantist, was a man of profound knowledge. The song moved him to tears though he didn't understand its meaning. Nangta would say, 'Ah! What is this?'

Nangta used to teach me: What you get by repeating the word ‘Gita’ ten times is the essence of the book. In other words, if you repeat ‘Gita ten times it is reversed into ‘tagi’, which indicates renunciation. Nangta used to teach how to establish oneself in the true Self, saying, ‘Merge the mind in the buddhi and the buddhi in the Atman; then you will be established in your true Self.’

I learnt Vedanta from Nangta: ‘Brahman alone is real; the world is illusory.’ The magician performs his magic. He produces a mango-tree which even bears mangoes. But this is all sleight of hand. The magician alone is real.

Nangta used to instruct me about the nature of Satchidananda Brahman. He would say that It is like an infinite ocean—water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when It becomes active. Its activities are creation, preservation, and destruction. Again, he used to say that Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt—not even a trace of ash. Brahman is beyond mind and speech. A salt doll entered the ocean to measure its depth; but it did not return to tell others how deep the ocean was. It melted in the ocean itself.

Nangta used to say, ‘The world exists in mind alone and disappears in mind alone.’ He used to tell me how a jnani meditates: everywhere is water, all the regions above and below arc filled with water; man like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will see all this.

It is very troublesome to possess occult powers. Nangta taught me this by a story. A man who had acquired occult powers was sitting on the seashore when a storm arose. It caused him great discomfort; so he said, ‘Let the storm stop.’ His words could not remain unfulfilled. At that moment a ship was going full sail before the wind. When the storm ceased abruptly, the ship capsized and sank. The passengers perished and the sin of causing their death fell to the man. And because of that sin he lost his occult powers and went to hell. Occult power is sure to beget pride, and pride makes one forget God.

Nangta told me that there lived at his monastery an ascetic who had acquired occult powers. He used to go about with his eyes fixed on the sky. But when one of his companions left him, he became disconsolate.

One day in the Kali temple, Haladhari and Nangta were reading the Adhyatma Ramayana. Suddenly I had a vision of a river with woods on both sides. The trees and plants were green. Rama and Lakshmana were walking along wearing their shorts. One day, in front of the *kuthi*, I saw Arjuna’s chariot. Sri Krishna was seated in it as the charioteer. I still remember it.

Nangta mentioned that there were seven hundred Naga monks in their

monastery. The beginners were taught to meditate while sitting on their thick cushions, for a hard seat would be uncomfortable and the pain would divert their minds from God to the body. As they progressed in meditation, they were given less and less comfortable seats, and finally only an animal skin or the bare ground sufficed. In food and other matters also the same gradation was observed. In dress, for instance, they were trained by degrees to go with clothes. People from their very birth are fettered without ties of shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, good conduct, honour, and so on, so these monks were taught to renounce them one by one. After they were well-grounded in meditation, they were asked to roam from one holy place to another, first in the company of other monks and subsequently alone. Such was the method of training among the Nagas.

Nangta used to say that the mind merges in the buddhi, and the buddhi in Bodha, Consciousness. The aspirant does not attain the Knowledge of Brahman as long as he is conscious of his ego. The ego comes under one's control after one has obtained the Knowledge of Brahman and seen God. Otherwise the ego cannot be controlled. It is difficult to catch one's own shadow. But when the sun is overhead, the shadow is within *a.* few inches of the body.

The Divine Mother has revealed to me the essence of the Vedanta. It is that Brahman alone is.real and the world illusory. The essence of Gita is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes reversed. It is then 'tagi', which refers to renunciation. The essence of the Gita is: 'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God.'

Even Brahma feels miserable when he falls into its maya's snare. You (pointing to Tota Puri) close your eyes and discriminate, "There is no thorn, nothing to prick," but as soon as your hand is hurt by a thorn, you cry out in pain. Similarly, you may reason in your mind that there is no such thing as birth or death, virtue or vice, pain or misery, hunger or thirst-that you are the Eternal Brahman, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute; but the moment there is some trouble with the body, or temptations overcome the mind, you forget all your philosophy and are overwhelmed with delusion and its painful consequences.

Nangta was a man of great knowledge, yet even he was about to drown himself in the Ganges. He stayed here eleven months. At one time he suffered from stomach trouble. The excruciating pain made him lose control over himself, arid he wanted to drown himself in the river. There was a long shoal near the bathing-ghat. However far he went into the river, he couldn't find water above his knees. Then he understood everything (He realized that man is not free

even to kill himself, that everything depends on the will of the Divine Mother) and came back.

While practising the disciplines of the Vedas, I became a sannyasi. I used to lie down in the chandni and say to Hriday: ‘I am a sannyasi. I shall take my meals here.’ I vowed to the Divine Mother that I would kill myself if I did not see God. I said to Her: ‘O Mother, I am a fool. Please teach me what is contained in the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures.’ The Mother said to me, ‘The essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory.’ The Satchidananda Brahman described in the Vedas is the Satchidananda Shiva of the Tantra and the Satchidananda Krishna of the Purana. I had all the experiences that one should have, according to the scriptures, after one’s direct perception of God. I saw the visions described in the scriptures.

For six months I was in that state(Nirvikalpa Samadhi) from which ordinary mortals never return. Ordinarily, the body can live only for twenty-one days in that state; then it falls like a dry leaf from a tree. There is no consciousness of time, the coming of day or the passing of night. Flies would enter my mouth and nostrils just as they do a dead body, but I did not feel them. My hair became matted with dust. Sometimes I did not know when the call of nature was answered. Could this body survive? It should have died at that time. But luckily a monk then arrived at Dakshineswar. He held a small stick, like a ruler. As soon as he saw me, he recognized my state. He understood that much of the Divine Mother’s work was yet to be done through this body, and many people would benefit if it were preserved. So at mealtimes he would bring some food and strike my body with his stick again and again to bring it back to consciousness. The moment he saw signs that I was becoming conscious, he would thrust some food into my mouth. Some days a little food found its way into my stomach; on other days none did. Six months passed in this way. At last I received the Mother’s command: ‘Stay in bhavamukha! Remain on the threshold of relative consciousness for the sake of humanity.’ Then I got a horrible disease—blood dysentery. I had terrible spasms and excruciating pain in the abdomen. After suffering from that pain for six months, my mind came down to the physical plane little by little. I regained my normal consciousness like other people. But at times the mind would frequently rush towards the nirvikalpa state and merge in it.

Sometimes I saw the universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes I saw all the quarters glittering with light, as if the world were a lake of mercury. Sometimes I saw the world as if made of liquid silver. Sometimes, again, I saw

all the quarters illumined as if with the light of Roman candles. It was revealed to me that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is like the process of evolution and involution.

One experience would hardly be over before another over-came me. It was like the movement of the husking machine: no sooner is one end down than the other goes up. I would see God in meditation, in the state of samadhi, and I would see the same God when my mind came back to the outer world. When looking at this side of the mirror I would see Him alone, and when looking on the reverse side I saw the same God.

Ah, what a state of mind I have passed through! My mind would lose itself in the Indivisible Absolute. How many days I spent that way! I renounced bhakti and bhakta, devotion and devotee. I became inert. I could not feel the form of my own head. I was about to die. I thought of keeping Ramlal's aunt (referring to his own wife) near me. I ordered the removal of all pictures and portraits from my room. When I regained outer consciousness, when the mind climbed down to the ordinary level, I felt as if I were being suffocated like a drowning person. At last I said to myself, 'If I can't bear people, then how shall I live?' Then my mind was directed to bhakti and bhakta. 'What has happened to me?' I kept asking people. Bholanath (a clerk at the Dakshineswar temple garden) said to me, 'This state of mind has been described in the Mahabharata.'

I was then seriously ill with stubborn diarrhoea. It was as if millions of ants were gnawing at my brain. But all the same, spiritual talk went on day and night. Dr. Rama of Natagore was called in to see me. He found me discussing spiritual truth. 'What a madman!' he said. 'Nothing is left of him but a few bones, and still he is reasoning like that!'

Once a monk came to live in the Panchavati. He would talk about Vedanta extensively with people. Then one day I heard that he was having an illicit love affair with a woman. I went in that direction to answer the call of nature and found him seated in the Panchavati. I said to him, 'You talk so much about Vedanta—now, what is this?' He replied: 'What does it matter? Let me explain to you that I have done nothing wrong. When everything in this world is unreal in the past, present, and future, how can my slips of character be real? They are also unreal.' Disgusted, I said to him, 'I spit upon such Vedantic knowledge as yours!' Worldly people have that kind of knowledge about Vedanta. That knowledge is no knowledge at all.

PRACTICE OF ISLAM

ISLAM TOO is a path to attain God. The infinitely sportive Divine Mother has

shown Herself to many people through this sadhana too. I must see how She fulfills the aspirations of the followers of this path. I shall take initiation from Govinda Roy and practise this path of Islam.

I then devoutly repeated the holy name of Allah, dressed like the Muslims, and said their prayers several times a day. Because the Hindu feeling had disappeared from my mind altogether, I felt disinclined to visit the Hindu deities, much less to bow down to them. I spent three days in that mood, and I had the full realization of the sadhana of their faith.

Rice with onions was cooked for me in the *kuthi*. I ate some. I ate curry in Mani Mallick's garden house, but I felt a kind of repulsion to it.

Once I was meditating under the banyan tree when I was shown a Mussalman (it was perhaps a vision of Mohammed, the founder of Islam) with a long beard. He came to me with the rice in an earthen plate. He fed some other Mussalmans with the rice and also gave me a few grains to eat. The Mother showed me that there exists only One, and not two. It is Satchidananda alone that has taken all these various forms; He alone has become the world and its living beings. Again, it is He who has become food.

The Divine Mother came to me another day as a Mussalman girl six or seven years old. She had a tilak on her forehead and was naked. Sbe walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.

One day I had the vision of Consciousness, non-dual and indivisible. At first it had been revealed to me that there were innumerable men, animals, and other creatures. Among them there were aristocrats, the English, the Mussalmans, myself, scavengers, dogs, and also a bearded Mussalman with an earthenware tray of rice in his hand. He put a few grains of rice into everybody's mouth. I too tasted a little. Another day I saw rice, vegetables, and other food-stuffs, and filth and dirt as well lying around. Suddenly the soul came out of my body and, like a flame, touched everything. It was like a protruding tongue of fire and tasted everything once, even the excreta. It was revealed to me that all these are one Substance, the non-dual and indivisible Consciousness.

PRACTICE OF CHRISTIANITY

Shambhu Charan Mallick read the Bible for Sri Ramakrishna and he became aware of the pure life of Jesus and of the Christian faith.

(At Jadulal mallick's house, Sri Ramakrishna saw the picture of Mother Mary and Infant Jesus, became animate and luminous, and the rays of light emanating from their bodies entered his heart filling it with faith in and reverence for

Jesus.)

(Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed:) "Mother, what are You doing to me?"

He then had a vision of Christian clergymen offering incense and lights in front of the image of Jesus in a church, expressing their inner longing through prayer.

After he returned to Dakshineswar temple garden, he was absorbed in meditation on Jesus and the waves of Christian faith that swayed him lasted for three days. When the Master was walking in the Panchvati at the end of the third day, he saw a beautiful but unfamiliar godman with a fair complexion advancing towards him, gazing at him steadily. Being charmed by the unique divine expression on his serene face, Sri Ramakrishna wondered who he could be. Very soon the figure drew near and a voice from within told him, "This is Jesus Christ, the great yogi, the loving son of God who is one with his father, who shed his heart's blood and suffered torture for the salvation of humanity." *Then Jesus embraced Sri Ramakrishna and merged into him.*

(*Later Sri Ramakrishna once spoke about his vision of Jesus)* "Well, you have read the Bible. What does it say about the features of Christ? What did he look like? ... I saw that his nose was slightly flattened at the tip."

I have practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look I see men quarrelling in the name of religion—Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas, and the rest; but they never reflect that He, who is called Krishna, is also called Shiva, and bears the name of Primitive Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well—the same Rama with a thousand names. The tank has several ghats. At one Hindus draw water in pitchers, and call it *jal*; at another Mussalmans draw water in leather bags and call it *pani*; at a third Christians take the same thing and call it *water*. Can we imagine that the water is not jal, but only pani or water? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names and everyone is seeking the same Substance; nothing but climate, temperament, and name vary. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him.

ON INTELLECTUALS AND ARISTOCRATS

Michael Madhusudan Dutt

Michael visited the temple garden when Narayan Shastri was living with me.

Dwarika Babu, Mathur's eldest son, brought him here. The owners of the temple garden were about to get into a lawsuit with the English proprietors of the neighbouring powder magazine; they wanted Michael's advice. I met him in the big room next to the manager's office. Narayan Shastri was with me. I asked Narayan to talk to him. Michael couldn't talk very well in Sanskrit. He made mistakes. Then they talked in the popular dialect. Narayan Shastri asked him his reason for giving up the Hindu religion. Pointing to his stomach, Michael said, 'It was for this.'Narayan said, 'What shall I say to a man who gives up his religion for his belly's sake?' Thereupon Michael asked me to say something. I said: I don't know why, but I don't feel like saying anything. Someone seems to be pressing my tongue.'

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

Mother, I am going to see the Pundit; but you know, I am absolutely devoid of learning.

(To Vidyasagar) Today I am before the "ocean". Up to now I have seen only canals and streams, or at best rivers. But today I see the ocean.

Once I said to Vidyasagar, 'Everything else but Brahman has been diluted, as it were, like food touched by tongue.' In other words, no one has been able to describe what Brahman is. A thing once uttered by the tongue becomes polluted. Vidyasagar, great pundit though he was, was highly pleased with my remarks.

One word of Vidyasagar's revealed to me the utmost limit of his intelligence. When I told him of the different manifestations of God's Power in different beings, he said to me, 'Sir, has God then given greater power to some than to others?' At once I said; 'Yes, certainly He has. If there are not different degrees of manifestation of His Power, then why should we have come to you after hearing of your knowledge and compassion. You haven't grown two horns, have you? With all his fame and erudition, Vidyasagar said such a childish thing as 'Has God given greater power to some than to others?' The truth is that when the fisherman draws his net, he first catches big fish like trout and carp; then he stirs up the mud with his feet and small fish come out—minnows, mudfish, and so on. So also, unless a man knows God, 'minnows' and the like gradually come out from within him. What can one achieve through mere scholarship?

I noticed that though Vidyasagar had no doubt read a great deal, he had not realized what was inside him; he was satisfied with helping boys get their education, but had not tasted the Bliss of God. What will mere study accomplish? How little one assimilates! The almanac may forecast twenty measures of rain; but you don't get a drop by squeezing its pages.

(To Vidyasagar) Please come once to see Rani Rashmani's garden. It is a delightful place.

I should like to visit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar a few times more. ... Vidyasagar is fully ready, but his inner stuff is covered with a thin layer. He is now engaged in doing good works; but he doesn't know what is within himself. Gold is hidden within him.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay

Bankim is one of your pundits. I met him once. I asked him, 'What is the duty of man?' And he had the impudence to say, 'Eating, sleeping, and sex gratification.' These words created in me a feeling of great aversion. I said: 'What are you saying? You are very mean. What you think day and night and what you do all the time come out through your lips. If a man eats radish, he belches radish.' Then we talked about God a great deal. There was also much devotional music in the room, and I danced. Then Bankim said to me, 'Sir, please come to our house once.' 'That depends on the will of God', I replied. 'There also', he said, 'you will find devotees of God.' I laughed and said: 'What kind of devotees are they? Are they like those who said, "Gopal! Gopal!"?

Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar
(Physician to Sri Ramakrishna)

(To Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar) Listen. If you realize Atman you will see the truth of all I have said. All doubts disappear after the vision of God. ... Learn from me as much as I have told you. But if you want to know more, you must pray to God in solitude. Ask Him why He has so ordained. '

(To other devotees) I shall not have to tell him very much. When the trunk of a tree is cut almost to the other side, the cutter steps aside. A little later the tree falls down of itself. The doctor has already changed a great deal.'

(To Dr.) Your son Amrita does not believe in the Incarnation of God. What is the harm in that? One realizes God even if one believes Him to be formless. One also realizes God if one believes that God has form. Whether you follow the ideal of the Personal God or that of the Impersonal Truth, you will realize God alone, provided you are restless for Him. Your son Amrita is a nice boy. He is quite guileless, is still free from worldliness, untouched by 'woman and gold'.

I am unlettered and yet educated people come here. How amazing! You must admit that it is the play of the God.'

(To Dr.) You are unshakable and motionless like Mount Sumeru. You are a very deep soul.

What the doctor is speaking of is called love without any selfish motive. I do not want anything from Dr. Mahendra Sarkar; I do not need anything from him, but still I love to see him. This is love for love's sake. But suppose I get a little joy from it; how can I help it? ... That is Dr. Sarkar's attitude. It is like seeking God alone, and not asking Him for wealth, fame, bodily comforts, or anything else. This is called pure love. ... Don't you understand the doctor's inner feeling? It is the prayer of a devotee to God for right purpose, that he may have no inclination for evil things.'

(To Dr.) You see, you have love for this [meaning himself]. You told me that you loved me.

(To other devotees pointing to Dr. Sarkar) When a thing is boiled, it becomes soft. At first he was very hard. Now he is softening from inside. He is now following the path of negation. ... But later he will follow the path of affirmation and accept everything as the manifestation of God.

You see, my mind was completely merged in the Indivisible Brahman. After that I saw many things. I found that the doctor will have spiritual awakening. But it will take some time. I won't have to tell him much.

(To Dr.) I saw you yesterday (29.10.1885) in my samadhi. I found that you are a mine of knowledge; but it is all dry knowledge. You have not tasted divine bliss. ... (to Pratap, referring to Dr.) If he ever tastes divine bliss, he will see everything, above and below, filled with it. Then he will not say that whatever he says is right and what others say is wrong. Then he will not utter sharp, strong, pointed words.

(To Dr.) Mahindra Babu, what is this madness of yours about money? Why such attachment to wife? Why such longing for name and fame? Give up all these, now, and direct your mind to God with whole-hearted devotion. Enjoy the Bliss of God.

(To M.) The Doctor has been thinking of this place [meaning himself]. His faith is growing. Is it possible to get rid of egotism altogether? Such scholarship! Such fame! And he has so much money! But he doesn't show disrespect for what I say.

(To Dr.) You are very pure; otherwise I could not have put my foot on your lap .

Rani Rashmani, Mathur Nath Biswas

and his family

Rani Rashmani has bequeathed her large estate to the service of this temple, so that the offerings may be distributed among devotees and sadhus. That part of the offerings which comes to this room is taken only by the devotees who come here with a yearning for God, and the gift of Rashmani is turned to good account. But what use is made of the other part which goes to the priests of this temple? They sell it in the market, and some even feed their mistresses with it! I fight with the men in charge for the share that comes here in order that Rashmani's object may be at least partially fulfilled.

When God assumes a human body for the sake of His devotees, many of His devotees accompany Him to this earth. Some of them belong to the inner circle, some to the outer circle, and some become the suppliers of His physical needs. The Divine Mother also showed me in a vision the five suppliers of my needs; first, Mathur Babu, and second, Sambhu Mallick, whom I had not then met. I had a vision of a fair-skinned man with a cap on his head. Many days later, when I first met Sambhu, I recalled that vision; I realized that it was he whom I had seen in that ecstatic state. I haven't yet found out the three other suppliers of my wants. But they were all of a fair complexion. Surendra looks like one of them.

In that state of divine exaltation I could no longer perform the formal worship. 'Mother,' I said, 'who will look after me? I haven't the power to take care of myself. I want to listen only to talk about Thee. I want to feed Thy devotees. I want to give a little help to those whom I chance to meet. How will all that be possible, Mother? Give me a rich man to stand by me.' That is why Mathur Babu did so much to serve me for fourteen years. And in how many ways! At my request he arranged a special store-room for the sadhus. He provided me with a carriage and palanquin. And whatever I asked him to give to anyone, he gave. The Brahmani identified him with Prataprudra.

Mathur once told me: 'Even God has to obey His own laws. Once God establishes a law, not even He can overrule it.' I said: 'What do you mean? He who makes a law can unmake it if he so desires, or he can replace it with another law.' Mathur refused to accept this view. He said: 'It is God who made the law that a red flower tree will produce only red flowers and never white ones. Let me see if He can produce a white blossom on a red flowering tree.' I replied: 'If He wills, He can do everything—even that.' Still he refused to accept my words. The next day when I went towards the pine grove to answer the call of nature, I saw two flowers on the same branch of a red hibiscus tree, one red and the other dazzling white without any red stain. I broke off the branch, took it to Mathur, and said, 'Look.' Mathur then said, 'Yes, Father, I am defeated.' Mathur

described his wonderful vision. He said: ‘Father, I was watching you just now as you walked back and forth. I saw it distinctly: As you walked towards me, you were no longer yourself. You were the Divine Mother Kali from the temple! Then, as you turned around and walked in the opposite direction, you became Lord Shiva! At first I thought it was some kind of optical illusion. I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but I saw the same thing. As often as I looked I saw it!’ He said this again and again, crying. I said, ‘But I know nothing about this.’ He ignored me. I became very nervous. I thought that if someone reported this to Rani Rashmani, she might misunderstand and think that I had put a spell on Mathur. I consoled him in various ways and finally calmed him down. Was it for nothing that Mathur served me and loved me so much? The Divine Mother granted him various visions and experiences on many occasions. It was written in Mathur’s horoscope that his Ishta [Chosen Deity] would always be gracious to him—nay, would even accompany him wherever he went and assume a human form to protect him. Once Mathur Babu said to me: ‘Father, there is nothing inside you but God. Your body is like a pumpkin, but inside there is nothing—neither flesh nor seed. Once I saw you as someone moving with a veil on.’

This childlike impatience of mine is nothing new. I used to ask Mathur Babu to feel my pulse and tell me whether I was ill.

Once Mathur Babu wanted to give me an estate and consulted Hriday about it. I overheard the whole thing from the Kali temple and said to him: ‘Please don’t harbour any such thought. It will injure me greatly.’

Once a thief stole the jewels from the images in the temple of Radhakanta. Mathur Babu entered the temple and said to the Deity: ‘What a shame, O God! You couldn’t save Your own ornaments.’ ‘The idea!’ I said to Mathur, ‘Does He who has Lakshmi for His handmaid and attendant ever lack any splendour? Those jewels may be precious to you, but to God they are no better than lumps of clay. Shame on you! You shouldn’t have spoken so meanly. What riches can you give to God to magnify His glory?’

The worldly man always has some desire or other, though at times he shows much devotion to God. Once Mathur Babu was entangled in a lawsuit. He said to me in the shrine of Kali, ‘Sir, please offer this flower to the Divine Mother.’ I offered it unsuspectingly, but he firmly believed that he would attain his objective if I offered the flower.

Gauri would not refer to himself as ‘I’ lest he should feel egotistic. He would say ‘this’ instead. I followed his example and would refer to myself as ‘this’ instead of I. Instead of saying, ‘I have eaten,’ I would say, ‘This has eaten.’ Mathur noticed it and said one day: ‘What is this, revered father? Why should you talk that way? Let them talk that way. They have their egotism. You are free

from it; you don't have to talk like them.'

Once I spoke highly of Vaishnavacharan to Mathur and persuaded him to invite Vaishnavacharan to his house. Mathur welcomed him with great courtesy. He fed his guest from silver plates. Then do you know what happened? Vaishnav said in front of Mathur, 'You will achieve nothing whatsoever in spiritual life unless you accept Krishna as your Ideal.' Mathur was a follower of the Shakta cult and a worshipper of the Divine Mother. At once his face became crimson. I nudged Vaishnavacharan.

Once I went to a certain place with Mathur Babu. Many pundits came forward to argue with me. And you all know that I am a fool. The pundits saw that strange mood of mine. When the conversation was over, they said to me: 'Sir, after hearing your words, all that we have studied before, our knowledge and scholarship has proved to be mere spittle. Now we realize that a man does not lack wisdom if he has the grace of God. The fool becomes wise and the mute eloquent.'

Another day I learnt of a good man named Dina Mukherji, living at Baghbazar near the bridge. He was a devotee. I asked Mathur to take me there. Finding me insistent, he took me to Dina's house in a carriage.- It was a small place. The arrival of a rich man in a big carriage embarrassed the inmates. We too were embarrassed. That day Dina's son was being invested with the sacred thread. The house was crowded, and there was hardly any place for Dina to receive us. We were about to enter a side room, when someone cried out: 'Please don't go into that room, There are ladies there.' It was really a distressing situation. Returning, Mathur Babu said, 'Father, I shall never listen to you again.' I laughed.

Once Mathur Babu was in an ecstatic mood. He behaved like a drunkard and could not look after his work. At this all said: 'Who will look after his estate if he behaves like that? Certainly the young priest (Sri Ramakrishna, who was at that time a priest in the Kali temple) has cast a spell upon him.'Mathur sent for me. When I went to his place, I found him altogether changed. He wasn't the same man. While talking about God, he shed floods of tears. His eyes were red from weeping, and his heart was pounding. When he saw me, he fell down and clasped my feet. 'Father,' he said, 'I admit it—I am beaten! I've been in this state for the past three days. I can't apply my mind to worldly affairs, however hard I try. Everything is going wrong. Please take back the ecstasy you gave me. I don't want it.' 'But you begged me for ecstasy,' I said. He then said: 'I know I did. And it is indeed a blissful state—but what is the use of bliss when all my worldly affairs are going to pieces? This ecstasy of yours, Father, suits only you. The rest of us don't really want it. Please take it back.' Then I laughed and said, 'That's what I told you all along,' 'I know you did, Father,' replied Mathur, 'but what I

didn’t understand was that this thing would possess me like a spirit, and that I’d have to take every step and do everything exactly as it told me to, twenty-four hours a day!’ Then I rubbed Mathur’s chest, and he was himself again.

I used to sleep in the same room with Mathur and his wife. They took care of me as if I were their own child. I was then passing through a state of divine madness. Mathur would ask me, ‘Father, do you hear our conversation?’ ‘Yes’, I would reply.

Once Mathur’s wife became suspicious of his movements and said to him, ‘If you go anywhere, he must accompany you.’ One day Mathur went to a certain place and asked me to wait downstairs. He returned after half an hour and said to me: ‘Come, father, let us go now. The carriage is waiting downstairs.’ When Mathur’s wife asked me about it, I reported the thing correctly. I said to her: ‘We went to a certain house. He told me to stay downstairs and himself went upstairs. He came down after half an hour and we left the place.’ Of course she understood the thing in her own way.

At that time I was almost unconscious of the outer world. Mathur Babu kept me at his Janbazar mansion a few days. While living there I regarded myself as the handmaid of the Divine Mother. The ladies of the house didn’t feel at all bashful with me. They felt as free before me as women feel before a small boy or girl. I used to escort Mathur’s daughter to her husband’s chamber with the maidservent.’

Was it for nothing that Mathur served me faithfully for fourteen years? The Divine Mother showed him various supernatural things through this body (pointing to himself). For that reason he served me with such devotion.

(Seeing Mathur miserable due to his wife’s terrible illness, Sri Ramakrishna assured him in an ecstatic mood that she will recover.)

Jagadamba (wife of Mathur Babu) slowly began to recover from critical condition, but the suffering caused by her disease was transferred to this body. After curing her, I suffered for six months from dysentery and other complaints.

The man was Chandra Haldar, a priest of the Kali temple at Kalighat; he often came to Mathur Babu’s house. One day I was lying on the ground in an ecstatic mood. The room was dark. Chandra Haldar thought I was feigning that state in order to win Mathur’s favour. He entered the room and kicked me several times with his boots. It left black marks on my body. Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it, but I forbade them.

Chandra Haldar really believed me to be the possessor of some magic charm. I tried my best on many occasions to remove this false idea from his mind, but I could not do it.” A partner of Mathur’s estate used to take fruits and vegetables stealthily from the temple garden. When the other partners asked me about it, I

told them the exact truths

Once I said to Mathur Babu: ‘Don’t think that I have achieved my desired end because you, a rich man, show me respect. It matters very little to me whether you obey me or not.’

Holy Mother

WHY ARE YOU (pointing to Mother Chandra Devi and elder brother Rameshwar) fruitlessly looking for the girl hither and thither? Go to Ramachandra Mukherjee’s house at Jayrambati and you will find the girl there, tied as it were with straws.

They (referring to his in-laws) may take the girl back but they cannot nullify the marriage.

No, don’t wake her up (referring to Holy Mother’s falling asleep on the floor during spiritual conversations with her and her companions). If she listens to everything I say, she will not stay on this earth; she will unfold her wings and fly away.

As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw Sarada, he said: ‘So you have come. I am very happy. You have come so late. Alas, my Mathur is no longer alive to look after you. With his death I feel as if I have lost my right arm.’

I said to her: ‘As the moon is the “Uncle” of all children, so God is everyone’s very own. All have an equal right to call on Him. He who prays to God will surely be blessed by His vision. Pray to God and you will certainly see Him.’

I once told Sarada, ‘The Mother who is worshipped in the temple, and the mother who gave birth to this [pointing to his body] and is now living in the Nahabat—the same mother is now stroking my feet. Really and truly I always regard you as the embodiment of the blissful Mother of the Universe.’

As for me, the Mother has shown me that She resides in every woman, and so I have learned to look upon every woman as Mother. That is the one idea I can have about you, but if you wish to draw me into the world, as I have been married to you, I am at your service.

I said to myself: ‘O mind, this is a woman’s body. People regard it as a most covetable object and are ever eager to enjoy it. But if a man embraces this body, he becomes entangled in the world and cannot realize God. Now, O mind, don’t be a hypocrite. Your tongue must not say what you do not feel at heart. Be truthful and tell me what you want: this body or God. If you want the body, it is right here in front of you.

Take it.’

I kept her for eight months with me. Both of us behaved as if we were the handmaids of the Divine Mother. One day I was in an ecstatic mood. My wife asked me, ‘How do you regard me?’ ‘As the Blissful Mother’, I said.

The attitude of looking on woman as mother is very pure. Looking on woman as mother is like fasting on the ekadasi day without touching even a drop of water; in this attitude there is not the slightest trace of sensual enjoyment. I worshipped the *Shodashi* as my mother; I looked on all parts of her body as those of my mother. This attitude of regarding God as Mother is the last word in sadhana. I invoked the Deity for the *Shodashi* Puja by uttering this prayer: ‘O Divine Mother! O Eternal Virgin, possessor of all power! Please open the gate of perfection. Purify her body and mind, and manifest Thyself through her for the welfare of all.’

At the news of her illness I said to Hriday: ‘What is going to happen? If she just comes to the world and departs, when will she fulfil the purpose of her human embodiment?’

Once I gave Hriday a warning and said; ‘You may insult me, but don’t hurt her feelings. If He who dwells in this (meaning his own body) hisses, you may somehow get by; but if He who dwells in her hisses, no one—not even Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva—will be able to protect you.’

When I jumped up from my seat and exclaimed: ‘This time everyone will be liberated, including the Mussalmans and the untouchables. None will be left behind,’ villagers of Jayrambati would say: ‘What a madman!’

A man visits his father-in-law’s house. I, too, often used to think that I should marry, go to my father-in-law’s house, and have great fun. But see what has come of it!’

I once heard my mother-in-law, saying, ‘I have married my daughter to such a madman that she will never know the happiness of a householder’s life. She will not have any children and feel the joy of being addressed as “Mother”’, and I said to her: ‘Mother, please do not worry about that. Your daughter will have so many children that her ears will burn from her constantly being called “Mother.”

Keep your eyes on this brahmin woman (referring to Golap-Ma). She will live with you permanently. (To the Holy Mother)

One day, while Latu was meditating by the bank of the Ganges, I happened to pass by and said to him: ‘Look here, Latu, the one on whom you are meditating is here now sweating over the flour.’

(To Holy Mother) This boy (pointing to Latu) is a pure soul. Whenever you need any help, please ask him.

On the occasion of one of her periodical visits to Kamarpukur, I said at the

midday meal: ‘She left today—I mean Ramlal’s aunt (referring to Sarada Devi). ... I watched her departure and didn’t feel anything about it. Honestly I thought of her as a stranger. But the next moment I was worried about my meals. I said to myself: “Who will cook for me?” You know I cannot digest every sort of food. Further, while I am eating I do not always retain normal consciousness. She knows what suits my stomach; so she cooks different vegetables. Now I am frankly worried about my meals.’

Once I wanted to go to a certain place. I asked Ramlal’s aunt about it. She forbade me to go; so I could not. A little while later I said to myself: ‘I am not a householder. I have renounced woman and gold. If, in spite of that, this is my plight, one can well imagine how much worldly people are controlled by their wives.’

When a Marwari devotee offered me ten thousand rupees, I felt as if someone had taken a saw to my head. I prayed, ‘Mother, after such a long time You tempt me again?’ In order to test her [the Holy Mother’s mind], I called her in and said: ‘Look, this devotee wants to give me this money. As I refused to accept it, he wants to give it to you. Why don’t you take it?’ She immediately replied: ‘How could this be possible? No, the money shouldn’t be accepted. My acceptance would be as good as yours. If I took it, I’d certainly spend it to serve you and buy things you need. You would be the virtual owner of it. People love and respect you for your renunciation. For that reason, this money can by no means be accepted.’ I heaved a sigh of relief at her words.

What a crowd in the Panihati festival! And everyone was watching me because of my bhava samadhi. She (the Holy Mother) made the correct decision not to go with us. If people had seen her with me, they would have remarked, ‘A pair of swans has come.’ She is extremely intelligent.

Had she (Holy Mother) not been so pure, and losing herself, assailed me, who knows that my self-control would not have broken down and body-consciousness arisen? I had importunately asked the Divine Mother after my marriage to keep her mind absolutely free from lust. After living with her at that time, I knew that the Divine Mother had really granted my prayer.

Last night I heard you (pointing to the Holy Mother) singing, and you seemed to be absorbed. That’s very good.

Why does she (the Holy Mother) wish to have ecstasies? Gauri (a woman devotee) has a masculine nature. But she (referring to Sarada Devi) should suppress her spiritual emotions.

She (referring to Sarada Devi) is Saraswati. She has assumed a human body to impart wisdom to men; but she has hidden her celestial beauty lest people, by looking at her, should befoul their minds with sinful thoughts.

Why should you worry? I shall leave you many children, all pure as gold, the like of whom women do not get even through the prayers and austerities of million of lives. So many people will call you mother that you will find it hard to look after them all.

I know who you are, but I shall not reveal it now.

Don't be worried. You (referring to Sarada Devi) will see later that people will worship my picture in their homes. I mean it, I swear it.

Look here, won't you do anything? Must this (pointing to his body) do everything? ...No, no, you will have to do many things. Look at the people of Calcutta; they are like worms squirming in darkness. You must bring light to them.

Let me tell you something. Do not stretch out hand to anyone even for a penny. You will not lack simple food and clothes. If you hold your hand out to anyone, remember, you will sell him your head also. If absolutely necessary, you may beg your food, but never live in anyone else's house. The devotees may welcome you in their houses with great respect and affection, but never allow your own hut in Kamarpukur to fall into disrepair.

If I come here, where will you (pointing to Holy Mother and Laxmi Devi) stay? Your hearts will pine for me. Our roots are twined together like kalmi plant (a creeper that grows on the surface of a pond)—pull one stem and the whole clump comes forward.

You (pointing to Holy Mother) have come. You see, I feel I am going somewhere to a distant land through water. Don't worry. You will live as you are living now. As Naren and the others are serving me, so they will also take care of you. Look after Lakshmi and keep her with you. She will manage herself and will not be a burden.

BRAHMO SAMAJ

Devendra Nath Tagore

One day I begged Mathur to take me to Devendra Tagore's house. I said: 'Devendra chants the name of God. I want to see him. Will you take me there?' Mathur Babu was a proud man. How could one expect him to go to another man's house uninvited? At first he hesitated. But then he said: 'All right. Devendra and I were fellow students. I will take you to him.'

We went to Devendra's house. Mathur and Devendra had not seen each other for a long time. Devendra said to Mathur: 'You have changed a little. You have grown fat around stomach.' Mathur said, referring to me: 'He has come to see

you. He is always mad about God,' I wanted to see Devendra's physical marks and said to him, 'Let me see your body.' He pulled up his shirt, and I found that he had very fair skin tinted red. His hair had not yet turned grey.

At the outset I noticed a little vanity in Devendra. And isn't that natural? He had such wealth, such scholarship, such name and fame! Noticing such streak of vanity, I asked Mathur: 'Well, is vanity the outcome of knowledge or ignorance? Can a knower of Brahman have such a feeling as, "I am a scholar; I am a jnani; I am rich"?'

While I was talking to Devendra, I suddenly got into the state of mind in which I can see a man as he really is. I was convulsed with laughter inside. In that state I regard scholars and the book-learned as mere straw. If I see that a scholar has no discrimination and renunciation, I regard him as worthless straw. I see that he is like a vulture, which soars high but fixes its look on a charnel-pit down below.

I found that Devendra had combined both yoga and bhoga in his life. He had a number of children, all young. The family physician was there. Thus, you see, though he was a jnani, yet he was preoccupied with worldly life. I said to him: 'You are the King Janaka of this Kaliyuga. Holding to one as well as the other, He drank his milk from a brimming cup! I have heard that you live in the world and think of God; so I have come to see you. Please tell me something about God.' He recited some texts from the Vedas. He said, 'This universe is like a chandelier and each living being is a light in it.' Once, meditating in the Panchavati, I too had a vision like that. I found his words agreed with my vision, and I thought he must be a very great man. I asked him to explain his words. He said: 'God has created men to manifest His own glory; otherwise, who could know this universe? Everything becomes dark without the lights in the chandelier. One cannot even see the chandelier itself.

We talked a long time. Devendra was pleased and said to me, 'You must come to our Brahmo Samaj festival.' 'That', I said, 'depends on the will of God. You can see the state of my mind. There's no knowing when God will put me into a particular state.' Devendra insisted: 'No, you must come. But put on your cloth and wear a shawl over your body. Someone might say something unkind about your untidiness, and that would hurt me.' 'No', I replied, 'I cannot promise that. I cannot be a babu.' Devendra and Mathur laughed. The very next day Mathur received a letter from Devendra forbidding me to go to the festival. He wrote that it would be ungentlemanly of me not to cover my body with a shawl.

Who has enjoyed the world as much as Devendranath Tagore? Once I visited his house with Mathur Babu. I saw that he had many young children. The family physician was there writing out prescriptions. If, after enjoying so much wealth,

Devendranath hadn't thought of God, then people would have cried shame upon him. Do you call anyone a man who doesn't pay off his father's debts if he is able to? But I admit that Devendranath is infinitely greater than other worldly men, who are sunk in their worldliness. They can learn much from him.

Keshab Chandra Sen

I had seen Keshab before I actually met him—I had seen him and his party in my samadhi. In front of me sat a roomful of men. Keshab looked like a peacock sitting with its tail spread out. The tail meant his followers. I saw a red gem on Keshab's head. That indicated his rajas. He said to his disciples, 'Please listen to what he is saying.' I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, these people hold the views of "Englishmen". Why should I talk to them?' Then the Mother explained to me that it would be like this in the Kaliyuga.

I first met Keshab at a meeting of Devendra's Adi Samaj at Jorashanko and found Keshab meditating on the dais. He was then a young man. Several members of the Samaj were sitting on the platform. Keshab was in the middle. I saw him motionless as a log. I said to Mathur Babu: 'Of all who are meditating here, this young man's "float" alone has sunk under water. The "fish" is biting at the hook.' Because of that power of meditation he "achieved what he wanted—name, fame, and so forth—through the grace of God. He assumed his father's debts. Others would have repudiated them.

Before meeting Keshab, I asked Narayan Shastri to visit him and tell me what he thought of him. Narayan reported that Keshab was an adept in japa. He knew astrology and remarked that Keshab had been born under a good star. Then I went to visit Keshab in Jaygopal's garden house at Belgharia. Hriday was with me. The moment I saw Keshab, I said: 'Of all the people I see here, he alone has dropped his tail. He can now live on land as well as in water, like a frog.' At this people laughed. Keshab said to them: 'Don't laugh. There must be some meaning in his words. Let us ask him.' Thereupon I said to Keshab: 'The tadpole, so long as it has not dropped its tail, lives only in water. It cannot move about on dry land. But as soon as it drops its tail it hops out on the bank; then it can live both on land and in water. Likewise, as long as a man has not dropped his tail of ignorance, he can Uve only in the water of the world. But when he drops his tail, that is to say, when he attains the Knowledge of God, then he can roam about as a free soul, or live as a householder if he likes.' I hear you have seen a vision of God. I have come to find out what it is. I went to Keshab's place and watched their prayer service. After speaking at length about the glories of God, Keshab announced, 'Let us now meditate on God.' I wondered how long

they would meditate. But, oh dear, they'd scarcely shut their eyes for two minutes before it was all over! How can one know God by meditating like that? I was watching their faces. Afterwards I said to Keshab: 'I've seen a lot of you meditate, and do you know what it reminded me of? Troops of monkeys sometimes sit quietly under the pine trees at Dakshineswar, just as if they were perfect gentlemen, quite innocent. But they aren't. As they sit there, they're thinking about all the gourds and pumpkins that householders train to grow over their roofs, and about all the gardens full of plaintains and eggplants. After a little while, they'll jump up with a yell and rush away to the gardens to stuff their stomachs. I saw many of you meditating like that.' And when the Brahmos heard that, they laughed.

You *(pointing to Keshab}* should alter the verse " *Think of Him and worship Him at every instant of the day"* into "Pray to Him and worship Him only twice a day." Say what you really do. Why tell fibs to the infinite? "

Keshab sent three members of the Brahmo Samaj in the temple garden at Dakshineswar to test me. Prasanna was one of them. They were commissioned to watch me day and night, and to report to Keshab. They were in my room and intended to spend the night there. They constantly uttered the word 'Dayamaya' and said to me: 'Follow Keshab Babu. That will do your good.' I said, 'I believe in God with form.' Still they went on with their exclamations of 'Dayamaya!' Then a strange mood came over me. I said to them, 'Get out of here!' I didn't allow them to spend the night in my room. So they slept on the verandah.

I once went to Jaygopal Sen's garden house wearing a red-bordered cloth. Keshab was there. Looking at the red borders Keshab said: 'What's this? Such a flash of colour today! Such a display of red borders!' I said, 'I have to cast a spell on Keshab; hence this display.'

Keshab and his followers got from here [meaning himself] the names of God and the Divine Mother. That is why the Divine Mother took Vijay away from Keshab's party. But Vijay did not join the Adi Samaj (a sect of the Brahmo Samaj).

Keshab Sen used to come here frequently. As a result, he changed a great deal. Many a time he came here with his party; but he also wanted to come alone. In the earlier years of his life Keshab didn't have much opportunity to live in the company of holy men. I visited him at his house in Colootola Street. Hriday was with me. We were shown into the room where Keshab was working. He was writing something. After a long while he put aside his pen, got off his chair, and sat on the floor with us. But he didn't salute us or show respect in any other way. One day in a spiritual mood I said to him: 'One should not sit before a sadhu with one leg over the other. That increases one's rajas.' As soon as he and his

friends would arrive, I would salute them before they bowed to me. Thus they gradually learnt to salute a holy man, touching the ground with their foreheads. I said to Keshab: ‘Chant the name of Hari. In the Kaliyuga one should sing the name and glories of God.’ After that they began to sing the name of God with drums and cymbals.

One day Keshab sent word that he would take me for a boat trip on the Ganges and bring with him a Westerner *(Reverend Joseph Cook, who was visiting India).* I was nervous that day also, and had to go to the pine grove again and again to answer the call of nature. When they arrived and I got into the boat, I had the same experience that I did when the pundit *(referring to Shashadhar)* came. I said many things unconsciously. Later, they (pointing to us) said, ‘You gave much wonderful advice.’ But you see, I was completely unaware of it.

Once Keshab came here with Sambhu Mallick. I said to him, ‘Not even a leaf moves except by the will of God.’ Where is man’s free will? All are under the will of God.

I said to Keshab Sen: ‘When a father sees that his son has become restless for his inheritence, he gives him his share of the property even three years before the legal time.’

Once at Keshab’s house I found myself in a new mood. The Brahmos always speak of the Impersonal; therefore I said to the Divine Mother in an ecstatic mood: ‘Mother, please don’t come here. They don’t believe in Your forms.’

Keshab Sen said to me: ‘Sir, suppose a man wants, first of all, to make a suitable arrangement of his property and estate and then think of God; will it be right for him to do so? Is there anything wrong about it?’ I said to him: ‘When a man feels utter dispassion, he looks on the world as a deep well and his relatives as venomous cobras. Then he cannot think of saving money or making arrangements about his property.’ God alone is real and all else illusory. To think of the world instead of God!’

Keshab Sen once said about me: ‘Now he asks us to hold to both—God and the world. But one day he will sting us.’ No, that is not true. Why should I sting?

Keshab Sen asked me, ‘Why do I not see God?’ I said, ‘You do not see God because you busy yourself with such things as name and fame and scholarship.’ The mother does not come to the child as long as it sucks its toys—a red toy. But when, after a few minutes, it throws the toy away and cries, then the mother takes down the rice-pot from the hearth and comes running to the child. You are engaged in arbitration. The Divine Mother says to Herself: ‘My child over there is now busy arbitrating and is very happy. Let him be.’

Keshab, Pratap, and others said to me, ‘Sir, we follow the ideal of King Janaka.’ ‘Mere words don’t make a King Janaka,’ I replied. ‘How many

austerities King Janaka first had to perform in solitude—standing on his head, and so on! Do something first; then you may become a King Janaka.' I said to Keshab further, 'How can the worldly man be cured of his serious disease unless he goes into solitude?' A worldly man is suffering from delirious fever, as it were. Suppose there are pickled tamarind and jars of water in the room of such a patient. Now, how can you expect him to get rid of the disease? He must be removed for a few days to another place where there are neither pickled tamarind nor water-jars. Then he will be cured. After that if he returns to his old room he will have nothing to fear. Only then can he lead a detached life in the world as King Janaka did. But he must be careful at the beginning. He must practise spiritual discipline in strict solitude.

I asked Keshab: 'Why do you give these statistics? Does a son say to his father: "O my father, you possess so many houses, so many horses, etc.?... It is natural for a father to put his resources at the disposal of his son. If you think of Him and His gifts as something extraordinary, you can never be intimate with Him, you cannot draw near to Him. Do not think of Him as if He were far away from you. Think of Him as your nearest! Then He will reveal Himself to you. ... Do you not see that if you go into an ecstasy over His attributes, you become an idolator?

I further said to him: 'God is with form and without form. Images and other symbols are just as valid as your attributes. And these attributes are not different from idolatory, but are merely hard and petrified forms of it. You wish to be strict and partial... For myself I have a burning desire to worship the Lord in as many ways as I can; nevertheless my heart's desire has never been satisfied. I long to worship with offerings of flowers and fruits, to repeat His holy name in solitude, to meditate upon Him, to sing His hymns, to dance in the joy of the Lord!... Those who believe that God is without form attain Him just as well as those who believe He has form. The only two essentials are faith and self-surrender... The world is the Mother's plaything. It is Her pleasure to let slip from Illusion one or two flying kites among the thousands. It is Her sport. She says to the human soul in confidence with a wink of the eye: 'Go and live in the world until I tell you to do something else!'

You (turning to the disciples of Keshab) are in the world. It is not for you to abandon it. You are very well as you are, pure gold and alloy, sugar and treacle... We sometimes play a game in which one must gain seventeen points to win. I have passed the limit and I have lost. But you clever people, who have not won enough points, can still continue to play... In truth it matters little if you live in the family or in the world, so long as you do not lose contact with God.'

Keshab was then spending himself in endless and fruitless polemics. I said to

him: ‘When you are filled with the essence of all existence, then whatever you say becomes true. Poets have praised virtue and truth; has that made their readers virtuous and truthful? When a selfless person lives amongst us, his deeds become the very heartbeat of virtue. Whatever he docs to others improves even their meanest dreams. Whatever he touches becomes true and pure. He becomes the father of reality. What he creates never flounders in time. This is what I expect you to do. Silence the dogs of invectives! Let the elephant of Being trumpet its blessings on all! You have that power; will you use it? Or shall you squander this lifetime by abusing people?’

Somebody once asked me what difference there was between the Brahmos and the other Hindus. ‘No very great one,’ I replied. ‘In a concert of hautboys one holds on the same note, while the others weave variations beneath it. The Brahmos always come back to the same note, the formless aspect of God. But the Hindus play His different aspects.’

In Keshab’s organization there was a young man with four university degrees. He laughed when he saw people arguing with me. He said: ‘To argue with him! How silly!’ I saw him again, later on, at one of Keshab’s meetings. But then he did not have the same bright complexion.

Once I went to Keshab’s house to see the performance of a play called ‘Nava-Vrindavan.’ They brought something on the stage which they called the ‘Gross.’ Another actor sprinkled water, which they said was the ‘Water of Peace.’ I saw a third actor staggering and reeling in the role of a drunkard. Another day I went to Keshab’a house to see the play called ‘Nimai-sannyas.’ Some flattering disciples of Keshab spoiled the whole performance. One of them said to Keshab, ‘You are the Chaitanya of the Kaliyuga.’ Keshab pointed to me and asked with a smile, ‘Then who is he?’ I replied: ‘Why, I am the servant of your servant. I am a speck of the dust of your feet.’ Keshab had a desire for name and fame.

One day I was taken to see a performance of a play at Keshab’s house. They gave me luchi and curries to eat. I didn’t know whether the food was handed to me by a washerman or a barber; but I ate quite a little. Rakhal had asked me to eat.

Keshab came on the stage in the role of a holy man and sprinkled the ‘Water of Peace’. But I didn’t like it. The idea of sprinkling such water on a theatrical stage after a performance! Another gentleman played the part of Sin. That is not good either. One should not commit sin; one should not even feign it.

I saw a deputy magistrate who came to see the play called ‘Nava-Vrindavan. He earned eight hundred rupees a month. Everyone said that he was a very learned man; but I found him restless because of a boy, his son. He was very anxious to find a good seat for the boy; he paid no attention to the spiritual

conversation of the players. The boy was pestering him with questions: ‘Father! What is this? What is that?’ He was extremely busy with the boy. You see, he merely read books; but he didn’t assimilate their ideas.

Once I talked to Keshab Sen about the Knowledge of Brahman. He asked me to explain it further. I said, ‘If I proceed further, then you won’t be able to preserve your organization and following.’ ‘Then please stop here!’ replied Keshab. But still I said to Keshab: ‘“I” and “mine” indicate ignorance. Without ignorance one cannot have such a feeling as “I am the doer; these are my wife, children, possessions, name and fame”.’ Thereupon Keshab said, ‘Sir, if one gave up the “I”, nothing whatever would remain.’ I reassured him and said: ‘I am not asking you to give up all of the “I”. You should give up only the “unripe I”. The “unripe I” makes one feel: “I am the doer. These are my wife and children. I am a teacher.” Renounce this “unripe I” and keep the “ripe I”, which will make you feel that you are the servant of God, His devotee, and that God is the Doer and you are His Instrument.’

I further said that the I that says, ‘I am a leader, I have formed this party, I am teaching people’, is the ‘unripe I’. It is very difficult to preach religion. It is not possible to do so without receiving the commandment of God. The permission of God is necessary. Sukadeva had a command from God to recite the Bhagavata. If, after realizing God, a man gets His command and becomes a preacher or teacher, then that preaching or teaching does no harm. His I is not ‘unripe I’; it is ‘ripe’. I asked Keshab to give up this ‘unripe I’. The ego that feels, ‘I am the servant of God and lover of God’ does not injure one.

I said to him: ‘You have been constantly talking of your organization and your followers. But people also go away from your organization.’ Keshab answered: ‘After staying in it several years, people go to another organization. What is worse, on deserting me they abuse me right and left.’ (To Keshab) ‘You have taken anybody and everybody without testing them, merely to increase your society’s numbers. So is it any wonder that your group is dissolving? I never accept anyone without testing them.’

I said to Keshab further: ‘You should accept the Divine Mother, the Primal Energy. Brahman is not different from its Shakti. What is Brahman is also Shakti. As long as a man remains conscious of the body, he is conscious of duality. It is only when a man tries to describe what he sees that he finds duality.’ Keshab later on recognized Kali.

Once I said to Keshab: ‘The greatest manifestation of God is in man. There are small holes in the balk of a field, where crabs and fish accumulate in the rainy season. If you want to find them you must seek them in the holes. If you seek God, you must seek Him in the Incarnations. The Divine Mother of the

Universe manifests Herself through this three-and-a-half cubit man.

The other day I saw a disciple of Keshab. A theatrical performance was being given in Keshab's house, and I saw the disciple dancing on the stage with a child in his arms. I understand that this man delivers 'lectures'. He had better lecture to himself.

The modern Brahmajnanis have not tasted Thy sweet bliss. Their eyes look dry and so do their faces. They won't achieve anything without ecstatic love of God.

One day Keshab came here with his followers. They stayed till ten at night. We were all seated in the Panchavati. Pratap and several others said they would like to spend the night here. Keshab said: 'No, I must go. I have some work to do.' I laughed and said: 'Can't you sleep without the smell of your fish-basket? Once a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers are kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, "Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?" The fishwife said: "I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep." The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound a sleep and snored all night.' At this story the followers of Keshab burst into loud laughter.

One day Keshab and his party came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar. I told them I wanted to hear how they lectured. A meeting was arranged in the paved courtyard above the bathing-ghat on the Ganges, where Keshab gave a talk. He spoke very well. I went into a trance. After the lecture I said to Keshab, 'Why do you so often say such things as: "O God, what beautiful flowers Thou hast made! O God, thou hast created the heavens, the stars, and the oceans!" and so on?' Those who love splendour themselves are fond of dwelling on God's splendour.

Keshab conducted the prayer that evening at the bathing ghat (at Dakshineswar Garden Temple) on the river. After the worship, I said to him: 'It is God who manifests Himself, in one aspect, as the scriptures; therefore one should worship the sacred books, such as the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras. In another aspect he has become the devotee. The heart of the devotee is God's drawing-room. One can easily find one's master in the drawing-room. Therefore, by worshipping His devotee, one worships God Himself! Keshab and his followers listened to my words with great attention. It was a full-moon night. The sky was flooded with light. We were seated in the open court at the top of

the stairs leading to the river. I said to them, ‘Say, “Brahman is verily Shakti; Shakti is verily Brahman.”’ And they chanted it in unison. I said to them: ‘He whom you address as Brahma is none other than She whom I call Mother. Mother is a very sweet name. It is called Brahman in the Vedas when it transcends speech and thought and is without attributes and action. I call it Shakti, Adyashakti, and so forth, when I find it creating, preserving, and destroying the universe.’ Then I said to them, ‘Say, “Guru-Krishna-Vaishnava.”’ At this Keshab said: ‘We must not go so far, sir. If we do that, then all will take us for orthodox Vaishnavas.’

Keshab Sen too asked me about the after-life. I said to him, ‘What need have you of all these calculations?’ Then I said: ‘As long as a man does not realize God, he will return to the world. The potter puts his clay jars and lids out in the sun to bake. If cattle trample them underfoot, he throws away the baked ones. But he collects the soft ones, mixes them with more clay, puts them on the wheel, and makes new vessels from them.’ Keshab was a great scholar. He lectured in English, Many people would honour him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him. But when Keshab came here he would be bare-bodied and bring some fruit, as one should when visiting a holy man. He was totally free from egotism. How guileless he was! One day he visited the Kali temple at Dakshineswar. At about four in the afternoon he went around to the guest-house, where the poor are fed, and asked when the beggars would be fed—He didn’t know that it was too late in the day for the feeding of the poor.

(Ram said) Keshab Sen used to say: ‘Why do people go to him (referring to the Master) so much? One day he will sting them and they will flee from him.’ (Sri Ramakrishna said:) Why should I sting people? I say to people; ‘Do this as well as that. Do your worldly duties and call on God as well.’ I don’t ask them to renounce everything.

One day Keshab was delivering a lecture. He said, ‘O Lord, grant us that we may dive into the river of divine love and go straight to the Ocean of Satchidananda.’ The ladies were seated behind the screen. I said to Keshab, ‘How can you all dive once for all?’ Pointing to the ladies, I said: ‘Then what would happen to them? Every now and then you must return to dry land. You must dive and rise alternately.’ Keshab and the others laughed.

Keshab at one time thought a great deal of Christinity and the Christian views. At that time, and even before, he belonged to Devendranath Tagore’s organization. ... Keshab now believes in Kali as the Embodiment of Spirit and Consciousness, the Primal Energy. Besides, he repeats the holy name of the Mother and chants Her glories.

(To Keshab) Well, Keshab, is it true that your Calcutta Babus deny the

existence of God? One such Babu was going up the stairs. He took one step, but before taking the next one he cried, ‘Oh! My side! My side!’ and fell unconscious. There was a hue and cry for a doctor. But before he came the man was dead. And such people say, ‘There is no God!’

There must be some substance in it (referring to the Nava Vidhan). Otherwise, why should so many people respect Keshab? Why isn’t Shivnath honoured as much as Keshab? Such a thing cannot happen without the will of God. Keshab led the life of a householder; hence his mind was directed to the world also. He had to safeguard his family interests. That is why he left his affairs in such good order though he delivered so many religious lectures. What an aristocratic man he married his daughter to! Inside Keshab’s inner apartments I saw many big bedsteads. All these things gradually come to one who leads a householder’s life. The world is indeed a place for enjoyment.

Why should the Brahmos write about me now? I eat and drink and make merry. I don’t know anything else. I once asked Keshab, ‘Why have you written about me?’ He said that it would bring people here.

I once met a relative of Keshab Sen, fifty years old. He was playing cards. As if time had not yet come for him to think of God!

Keshab and his followers got from here (meaning himself) the names of Hari and the Divine Mother. That is why the Divine Mother took Vijay away from Keshab’s party. But Vijay did not join the Adi Samaj.

(To Vijay Krishna) Look, Keshab has offered flowers at my feet and requested me not to tell anyone. Please don’t tell it to others.

(To Kesab) Keshab, though you lecture a great deal, your fame will not reach very far. But this lad (pointing to Narendra) will be famous across the seas.

Vijay Krishna Goswami

Look here (TO Keshab). There is Vijay. Your quarrel seems like the fight between Shiva and Rama. Shiva was Rama’s guru. Though they fought with each other, yet they soon came to terms. But the grimaces of the ghosts, the followers of Shiva, and the gibberish of the monkeys, the followers of Rama, would not come to an end!

(To Vijay) The task of a religious teacher is indeed difficult. One cannot teach men without a direct command from God. People won’t listen to you if you teach without such authority. Such teaching has no force behind it. One must first of all attain God through spiritual discipline or other means. Thus armed with authority from God, one can deliver lectures.Vijay has reached the room just next to the innermost chamber, where one attain fulfillment of sadhana, and now he is knocking at its door.

Once in that strange mood of mine I placed my foot on Vijay's chest. You know how greatly I respect him—and I placed my foot on his body! What do you say to that?

Vijay is in a wonderful state of mind nowadays. He can hardly control his emotion: while uttering Hari's name, he sometimes stands up from his seat. He devotes himself to kirtan, meditation, and other spiritual practices till four in the morning. The forms of God that Vijay sees nowadays are all real. Speaking about the different aspects of God, formless and with form, Vijay said that God sometimes appears with attributes and sometimes without attributes. He gave the example of the chameleon, which sometimes turns red, sometimes blue, sometimes green, and sometimes remains colourless. He now puts on an ochre robe and prostrates himself before the images of God. Vijay is really guileless. Yesterday Vijay was at Adhar Sen's house. He behaved as if it was his own place and those lived there his own people. One cannot be guileless and liberal-minded unless one is free from worldliness. Once he accompanied me to Gadadhar's schoolhouse. At once he prostrated himself there. Again he fell prostrate before the picture of Chaitanyadeva. Vijay's father would become unconscious of the world in divine ecstasy while reading the Bhagavata.

Vijay's mother-in-law said to me, 'Why don't you tell Balaram that it is unnecessary to worship God with form; that it will be enough if he prays to the formless Satchidananda?' I replied, 'Why should I say such a thing, and why should he listen to me even if I should say it?'

(To Vijay) What devotion to God your mother-in-law has! About the worldly life she said to me: 'Oh, you needn't tell me about the world. No sooner does one wave disappear than another rises up.' 'But', I said, 'what is that to you? You have knowledge.' She replied: 'Where is my knowledge? I haven't yet been able to go beyond vidyamaya and avidyamaya. It won't help me much to go beyond just the illusion of ignorance; I shall have to transcend the illusion of knowledge as well. Only then shall I have true knowledge of God. I am quoting your own words.'

Vijay's mother-in-law said to me: 'How little I have achieved of my spiritual ideal! I cannot take food from everybody.' I said to her: 'Is eating everybody's food a sign of jnana? A dog eats anything and everything. Does that make it a jnani?' Nowadays Vijay takes great delight in kirtan. But I'm frightened when he dances, for the whole roof may collapse! Yes, such a thing actually happened in our part of the country, where people build two-storyed houses out of wood and mud. AVaishnava teacher went to a disciple's house and began kirtan on the upper floor. When the singing reached the right mood, people began to dance. Now that teacher was a little plump, like you *(addressing Vijay).* After he danced

for a while, the floor collapsed, and he fell through to the ground floor! That is why I'm afraid—your dancing might repeat that scene!

Nowadays Vijay is very fond of the ochre colour. Generally people dye their clothes and chadars ochre, but Vijay even dyes his shirt and shoes. That is good: A state comes when one wishes to do so, and one no longer wears clothes of any other colour. Ochre is indeed the mark of renunciation. It reminds the aspirant that he has renounced everything for God.

See what a change has come over Vijay's mind. He is an altogether different person. He is like thick milk from which all the water has been boiled off. You see, I can recognize a Paramahansa by his neck and forehead. Yes, I can recognize a Paramahansa.

Vijay had a vision of this form (meaning himself). Vijay said to me, 'I touched it exactly as I am touching you now.'

Shivnath Shastri and other Brahmos

Shivnath once said that one 'loses one's head' by thinking too much of God. 'What?', said I, 'Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.' Shivanath said that some Europeans had gone insane, that they had 'lost their heads', by thinking too much about God. In their case it may be true; for they think of worldly things. There is a line in a song: 'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness.' The consciousness referred to here is the consciousness of the outer world. (To Shivanath) You think day and night of bricks, wood, earth, money and all sorts of material things and yet consider yourself to be of sound mind, while I—who meditate day and night on God, whose consciousness makes the whole universe conscious—you consider to be ignorant and unconscious. A fine piece of reasoning! What sort of intellect you have?

(To Shivanath) Ah! Here is Shivanath! You see, you are a devotee of God. The very sight of you gladdens my heart. One hemp-smoker feels very happy to meet another. Very often they embrace each other in an exuberance of joy. Many people visit the temple garden at Dakshineswar. If I see some among the visitors indifferent to God, I say to them, 'You had better sit over there.' Or sometimes I say to them, 'Go and see the beautiful buildings.' Sometimes I find that the devotees of God are accompanied by worthless people. Their companions are immersed in gross worldliness and don't enjoy spiritual talk at all. Since the devotees keep on, for a long time, talking with me about God, the others become

restless. Finding it impossible to sit there any longer, they whisper to their devotee friends: ‘When shall we be going? How long will you stay here?’ The devotees say: ‘Wait a bit. We shall go after a little while.’ Then the worldly people say in a disgusted tone: ‘Well then, you can talk. We shall wait for you in the boat,’

I should like to visit Shivanath. ... Do you think the Brahmos will like me? They criticize those who believe in God with form.

(To Shivanath) As long as you were not here at the meeting, people talked a great deal about you and discussed your virtues. But no sooner did you arrive here than all that stopped. Now the very sight of you makes everyone happy. People now simply say, ‘Ah! Here is Shivanath Babu.’ All other talks about you has stopped.

(To Shivanath) I like to see you. How can I live unless I see pure-souled devotees? I feel as if they had been my friends in a former incarnation.

Why do I seek Shivnath? He who meditates on God for many days has substance in him, has divine power in him.

Ah, what a beautiful nature Kedar has! No sooner does he come to me than he bursts into tears. His eyes are always red and swim in tears, like a chanabara in syrup.

(To Srinath Mitra, a Brahmo devotee from Nandanbagan) Everything inside him can be seen through his eyes, as one sees the objects in a room through a glass door.

When I first heard you *(pointing to Trailokya Nath Sanyat]* sing this song —’In Wisdom’s firmament the moon of Love is rising full’—I immediately went into ecstasy and saw the bright full moon rising!?

Jaygopal came here the other day. He drove over here in a carriage. The lamps were broken, the horses seemed to have been returned from the charnel-house, and the coachman looked as if he had just been discharged from the Medical College Hospital. And he brought me two rotten pomegranates!

People like Pratap and Amrita are like good conch-shells, which give out a loud sound. And the rest, about whom you hear so much, don’t give out any sound at all.

Beni Pal has sent me an invitation to visit the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj. But why has he put the wrong date?

I live in the midst of worldly people; on all sides I see ‘woman and gold’. Nevertheless, this is the state of my mind: unceasing Samadhi and Bhava. That is the reason Pratap said, at the sight of my ecstatic mood: ‘Good heavens! It is as if he were possessed by a ghost.’

Once someone gave me a book of the Christians. I asked him to read it to me. It talked about nothing but sin. Sin is the only thing one hears of at your Brahmo Samaj, too. He who says day and night, ‘I am a sinner, I am a sinner’ verily becomes a sinner ... I went to the Nandanbagan Brahmo Samaj. After the worship the preacher gave a lecture from the raised platform. He had written it at home. As he read from the manuscript he looked around. While meditating, he opened his eyes from time to time to look at people. The instruction of a man who has not seen God does not produce the right effect. He may say one thing rightly, but he becomes confused about the next. What will such a lecture accomplish? Can it teach people anything? ... Once I went to a meeting of a Hari Sabha (of Brahmos). The preacher of the day was a pundit named Samadhyayi. And can you imagine what he said? He said in the course of the sermon: ‘God is dry. We must make Him sweet and fresh with our love and devotion.’ I was stunned to hear these words. Then I was reminded of a story. A boy once said: ‘At my uncle’s house, his whole cowshed is full of many horses.’ Just fancy, to describe God, who is the very nature of Love and Bliss, as dry! It only proves that the man has never experienced what God is like.

Rakhal says that the people in his native village have been suffering seriously from a scarcity of water. Why don’t you (pointing to Mani Mallick) build a reservoir there? That will do the people good. You have so much money; what will you do with all your wealth? But they say that telis (of oil-man caste) are very calculating.

The husband of Mani Mallick’s granddaughter was here. He read in a book that God could not be said to be quite wise and omniscient; otherwise, why should there be so much misery in the world? As regards death, it would be much better to kill a man all at once, instead of putting him through slow torture. Further, the author writes that if he himself were the Creator, he would have created a better world.

MONASTIC DISCIPLES

Narendra

Coming of Narendra

‘My prayer has been granted and my man must come to me one day.’

Narendra entered the room by the western door, the one that faces the Ganges. I noticed that he was not concerned about his appearance; his hair and his clothes weren’t tidy at all. Unlike his companions, he seemed completely detached, as if nothing external appealed to him. His eyes showed that the greater part of his

mind was turned inward all of the time. When I saw this, I marvelled to myself, ‘How is it possible that such a great spiritual aspirant can live in Calcutta, home to such materialistic people?’

There was a mat spread out on the floor. I asked him to be seated, and he sat down near the jar of Ganges water. ... I asked him about his singing and found that he knew only two or three songs in Bengali. I asked him to sing them. He began singing this Brahmo song: ‘Let us return once more, O mind, to your own abode!’ He sang that song with his whole soul, as though he were deep in meditation. When I heard it, I couldn’t control myself. I went into ecstasy.

(Addressing to Narendra) Ah! You have come so late. How unkind of you to keep me waiting so long! My ears are almost seared listening to the cheap talk of worldly people. Oh, how I have been yearning to unburden my mind to one who will understand my thought! Lord! I know you are the ancient sage Nara—the Incarnation of Narayana—born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind.

After Narendra left I felt a constant and agonizing desire to see him. At times the pain was so excruciating that I felt as if my heart were being squeezed like a wet towel. When I could no longer control myself, I would run to the pine grove on the northern side of the garden where people seldom go, and cry at the top of my voice: ‘O my child, come to me! I can’t live without seeing you!’ After crying this way for a while, I was able to control myself again. This state continued for six months. There were other boys who also came here. I felt greatly drawn to some of them, but nothing like the way I was attracted to Narendra.

Mother dear, I cannot live without seeing him. I have wept so much, and yet Narendra has not come. My heart is being squeezed as it were, so excruciating is the pain at not seeing him. But he does not care.

An old man pining and weeping for the boy! What will people think of me? You are my own people; I do not feel ashamed to confess it before you. But how will others take it? I cannot control myself. It is good that Naren does not come, for I experience a commotion of feeling when I see him. His coming is a great event here.

That day, after Narendra lost consciousness of his present incarnation in Jadu Mallick’s garden, I asked him many questions, such as who he really was, where he had come from, why he had come [been born], how long he would stay in this world, and so forth. He entered his innermost being and found the correct answers to my questions. These answers confirmed what I’d already learned about him in visions. It’s forbidden to reveal those things, but I can tell you this: On the day he knows who he really is, he will no longer remain in this world. With a strong effort of will, he will immediately give up his body through the

power of yoga. Narendra is a great soul, perfect in meditation.

One day I found that my mind was soaring high in samadhi along a luminous path. It soon transcended the stellar universe and entered the subtle realm of ideas. As it ascended higher and higher, I found the path lined with ideal forms of gods and goddesses on both sides. My mind then reached the outer limits of that region, where a luminous barrier separates the sphere of relative existence from that of the Absolute. My mind crossed that barrier to enter the transcendental realm, where no corporeal being was visible. Even the gods dare not enter that sublime realm and are content to keep their seats far below. But the next moment I saw seven venerable rishis seated there in samadhi. It occurred to me that these rishis must have surpassed not only humans but even the gods in knowledge and holiness, in renunciation and love. Lost in admiration, I was reflecting on their greatness when I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child. The child came to one of the rishis, tenderly clasped his neck with his lovely arms and, addressing him in a sweet voice, tried to drag his mind down from the state of samadhi. That magic touch roused the rishi from the superconscious state, and he fixed his half-opened eyes upon the wonderful child. His beaming countenance showed that the child was the treasure of his heart. In great joy the divine child spoke to him: 'I am going down. You must go with me.' The rishi remained mute but his tender look expressed his assent. As he gazed at the child, he again became immersed in samadhi. I was surprised to see a fragment of his body and mind then descending to earth in the form of a bright light. No sooner had I seen Narendra than I recognized him to be that rishi.

Why are you (pointing to Narendra) pestering me? Didn't you tell me that you have parents at home and needed to serve them? When I met you, I thought that I'd finally found a companion, but you cried out that you had parents. So I couldn't have a companion.

Look (addressing to a devotee Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal), Narendra is a man of pure sattva qualities. I saw in my vision that Narendra was one among the four *(Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, and Sanatkumara)* in the indivisible realm and also one of the seven rishis *(Marichi, Atri, Angira, Pulaha, Pulastya, Kratu, and Vashishtha).* There is no limit to his good qualities. I weep so much, but he does not come. My desire to see him causes a pain as if my heart were being wrung like a wet towel. He doesn't understand my spiritual attraction to him. Just see, I'm an old man pining and weeping for Narendra. What will people think of me? You are my own, so I'm not ashamed to express my feelings in your presence. But how will others react? I'm sorry, but I can't control myself.

When I met Narendra, I never asked him: 'Who is your father? How many

houses does he own?

Narendra is a great soul—perfect in meditation. He cuts the veils of maya to pieces with the sword of knowledge. Inscrutable maya can never bring him under her control.

(To Narendra) My child, suppose there is a bag of gold in one room, and a robber in the next room; do you think that robber can sleep? He cannot. His mind will be always thinking how to get into that room and obtain possession of that gold. Do you think then that a man firmly persuaded that there is a Reality behind all these appearances, that there is God, that there is One who never dies, One who is infinite bliss, a bliss compared with which these pleasures of the senses are simply playthings, can rest contended without struggling to attain it? Can he cease his efforts for a moment? No. He will become mad with longing.

I have never seen another boy like Narendra. He's as proficient in vocal and instrumental music as he is in studies, in conversation, and in religious matters. He meditates the entire night and is completely unaware when morning comes. Narendra isn't like a fake coin; if you test him as money-changer checks a coin (by tapping it), you will hear the right sound. I see other boys pass two or three examinations somehow by working as hard as they can, and there it ends, as if they used up all their energy in accomplishing this. But Narendra isn't like that. He does everything with ease and joy, and passing an examination is a trifling thing for him. He also goes to the Brahmo Samaj and sings devotional songs there. But he isn't like the other Brahmos; he is a true knower of Brahman. He sees a light when he sits for meditation. Is it for nothing that I love Narendra so much?

(To Narendra) When you sing, He who dwells here (touching his heart), like a snake hisses as it were, and then spreading His hood, quietly holds Himself steady and listens to your music.

Keshab possesses one power, which has made him world-famous, but Narendra is endowed with eighteen such powers. I have seen the divine light in Keshab and Vijay burning like a candle flame, but in Narendra it shines with the radiance of the sun, dispelling the last vestiges of ignorance and delusion.

Narendra is nitya-siddha *(eternally perfect);* Narendra is dhyana-siddha *(perfect in meditation).* The fire of knowledge that burns all impurities caused by food is always ablaze in Narendra. That's why his mind will never be distracted or polluted, no matter where or what he eats; Narendra is constantly cutting the bonds of Maya into pieces with the sword of knowledge, so Mahamaya is incapable of bringing him under Her control.

You (pointing to Narendra) have all the good marks on your body; the only defect is that you breathe heavily when sleeping. Yogis say this indicates a short life.

You (pointing to Narendra) must test me as the moneychangers test their coins. You mustn't accept me until you've tested me thoroughly.

Previously Naren did not believe in the Personal God or divine forms. Now he is dying for God's vision.

I have had many amazing visions. I had a vision of the Indivisible Satchidananda. Inside It I saw two groups with a fence between them. On one side were Kedar, Chuni, and other devotees who believe in the Personal God. On the other side was a luminous space like a heap of red brick-dust. Inside it was seated Narendra immersed in samadhi. Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called aloud, 'Oh, Narendra!' He opened his eyes a little. I came to realize that he had been born, in another form, in Simla in a kayastha family. At once I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, entangle him in maya; otherwise he will give up his body in samadhi.' Kedar, a believer in Personal God, peeped in and ran away with a shudder.

Whenever he (Narendra) came here, I would talk only with him, though the room was filled with people. He would say to me, 'Please talk to them', and then I would talk with the others. I became mad for the sight of him and wept for him in Jadu Mallick's garden house. I wept here, too, holding Bholanath's hand. Bholanath said, 'Sir, you shouldn't behave that way for a mere kayastha boy.' One day the 'fat brahmin' (a nickname for Prankrishna, a devotee) said to me about Narendra, with folded hands, 'Sir, he has very little education; why should you be so restless for him?'

At my first meeting with Narendra I found him completely indifferent to his body. When I touched his chest with my hand, he lost consciousness of the outer world. Regaining consciousness, Narendra said: 'Oh, what have you done to me? I have my father and mother at home!' The same thing happened at Jadu Mallick's house. As the days passed I longed more and more to see him. One day at that time I said to Bholanath: 'Can you tell me why I should feel this way? There is a boy called Narendra, of the kayastha caste. Why should I feel so restless for him?' Bholanath said: 'You will find the explanation in the Mahabharata. On coming down to the plane of ordinary consciousness, a man established in samadhi enjoys himself in the company of sattvic people. He feels peace of mind at the sight of such men.' When I heard this my mind was set at ease. Now and then I would sit alone and weep for the sight of Narendra.

Narendra belongs to a very high plane—the realm of the Absolute. He has a manly nature. So many devotees come here, but there is not one like him. Every

now and then I take stock of the devotees. I find that some are like lotuses with ten petals, some like lotuses with sixteen petals, some like lotuses with a hundred petals. But among lotuses Narendra is a thousand-pctalled one. Other devotees may be like pools or pitchers; but Narendra is a huge water-barrel. Others may be like pools or tanks; but Narendra is a huge reservoir like Haldarpukur. Among fish, Narendra is a huge red-eyed carp; others are, like minnows or smelts or sardines. Narendra is a Very big receptacle', one that can hold many things. He is like a bamboo with a big hollow space inside. Narendra is not under the control of anything. He is not under the control of attachment or sense pleasures. He is like a male pigeon. Narendra has the nature of a man; so he sits on the right side of a carriage. I feel great strength when Narendra is with me in a gathering.

At Jadu Mallick's garden house Narendra said to me, 'The forms of God that you see are the fiction of your mind.' I was amazed and said to him, 'But they speak too!' Narendra answered, 'Yes, one may think so.' I went to the temple and wept before the Mother, 'O Mother,' I said, 'what is this? Then is this all false? How could Narendra say that?' Instantly I had a revelation. I saw Consciousness —Indivisible Consciousness—and a divine being formed of that Consciousness. The divine form said to me, 'If your words are untrue, how is it that they tally with the facts?' Thereupon I said to Narendra: 'You rogue! You created unbelief in my mind. Don't come here any more.'

Those who are my own will come here even if I scold them. Look at Narendra's nature! At first he used to abuse my Mother Kali very much. One day I said to him sharply, 'Rascal! Don't come here any more.' He slowly left the room and prepared a smoke.

This boy (pointing to Narendra) has no faith in the forms of God and tells me that my supersensuous experiences are hallucinations; but he is a fine boy of pure tendencies. He does not believe anything unless he gets direct proof. He has studied much and is possessed of great judgement and discrimination.

Narendra's people are very much dissatisfied with him because he comes here now and then. The other day he came here in a hired carriage and Surendra paid for it. Narendra's aunt almost had a row with Surendra about it.?

Narendra once asked me, 'What good is there in bowing before the Brahmo Samaj temple?' The sight of the temple recalls to my mind God alone; then God-Consciousness is kindled in my mind. God is present where people talk about Him. One feels the presence of all the holy places. Places of worship recall God alone to my mind.

The members of the Brahmo Samaj do not accept God with form. Narendra

says that God with form is a mere idol. He says further: ‘What? He (referring to the Master) still goes to the Kali temple!’

One day I remarked that the chatak bird doesn’t drink any water except that which falls from the sky. Narendra said, ‘The chatak drinks ordinary water as well.’ Then I said to the Divine Mother, ‘Mother, then are my words untrue?’ I was greatly worried about it. Another day, later on, Narendra was here. Several birds were flying about in the room. He exclaimed, ‘There! There!’ ‘What is there?’ I asked. He said, ‘There is your chatak!’ I found they were only bats. Since that day I don’t accept what he says.

(Pointing to Narendra) You are a rogue. I won’t listen to you any more. Mother says that I love you because I see the Lord in you. The day I shall not see Him in you, I shall not be able to bear even the sight of you.

Once I said to Narendra: ‘God is the ocean of bliss. Tell me if you want to plunge into it. Just imagine there is some syrup in a cup and that you have become a fly. Now tell me where you will sit to sip the syrup. Narendra answered: ‘I will sit on the edge of the cup and stretch out my neck to drink, because I am sure to die if I go far into the cup.’ Then I said to him: ‘But my child, this is the ocean of Satchidananda. There is no fear of death in It. This is the Ocean of Immortality. Only ignorant people say that one should not have an excess of devotion and divine love. How foolish! Can there be any excess of divine love?’

Narendra doesn’t care about anyone. He is independent even of me. He doesn’t tell me all he knows, lest I should praise his scholarship before others. He is free from ignorance and delusion. He has no bonds. He is a great soul. Again, he keeps his passions under control and says that he will never marry. I look on Narendra as Atman. I obey him. ... Narendra doesn’t come here very often. That is good, for I am overwhelmed by his presence.

Narendra, Rakhal, and Niranjan have a masculine nature. Let no one judge Naren. No one will ever be able to understand him fully. Mother has told me that he can never fall into evil ways (by mixing with persons of questionable character.) & (To Narendra) If you remain day and night in the state of samadhi, the work of the Divine Mother will not be accomplished; therefore you won’t be able to induce that state again; when your work is finished, it will come again.

Now the Mother has shown you everything. But this realization, like the jewel locked in a box, will be hidden away from you and kept in my custody. I will keep the key with me. Only after you have fulfilled your mission on this earth will the box be unlocked, and you will know everything as you have known now.

Today, giving you my all, I have become a beggar. With this power you are to do many works for the world's good before you will return.

(Pointing to the other disciples) Narendra will give up his body of his own will. When he realizes his true nature, he will refuse to stay on this earth. Very soon he will shake the world by his intellectual and spiritual powers. I have prayed to the Divine Mother to keep away from him the Knowledge of the Absolute and cover his eyes with a veil of maya. There is much work to be done by him. But the veil, I see, is so thin that it may be rent at any time,

(Pointing to Narendra) He seems to be walking with an unsheathed sword in his hand.

Rakhal

Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal, and devotees like them belong to the group of the nityasiddhas; they are eternally free. Religious practices on their part is superfluous. Their spiritual consciousness has been awake since their very birth. They assume human bodies only to impart spiritual illumination to others.

Under the banyan tree in the Panchavati I had a vision of a child. Hriday said to me, 'Then a son will soon be born to you.' I said to him: 'But I regard all women as mother. How can I have a son?' That child is Rakhal. ... (Addressing Divine Mother) I said further: 'Certainly I shall not have any children, Mother. But it is my desire that a boy with sincere love for God should always remain with me. Give me such a boy.' That is the reason Rakhal came here. While listening to the kirtan, I had a vision of Rakhal in the midst of Sri Krishna's companions in Vrindavan.

Just a few days before Rakhal came, I saw the Divine Mother put a child on my lap and say, 'This your son.' I shuddered at the thought and asked Her in surprise: 'What do You mean? I too have a son?' Then She explained with a smile, 'He is not a son in the ordinary worldly sense but an all-renouncing spiritual son.' I was reassured. Rakhal came shortly after this vision, and I recognized him at once as the boy presented by the Divine Mother.

In those days, Rakhal had the nature of a child of three or four. He treated me just like a mother. He kept running to me and sitting on my lap. He wouldn't move a step from this place. He never thought of going home. I forced him to, from time to time, lest his father forbid his coming here altogether. His father was a landowner and immensely rich, but he was a miser.

At first he tried in various ways to keep his son from coming here. But when he came here once and saw how many wealthy and famous people visit this place, he didn't object anymore. After that, he would come now and then to visit

Rakhal. I was most respectful and attentive to him. He liked that.

As for the family of Rakhal's wife, they raised no objections. Manomohan's mother, wife, sisters used to come here very often. Soon after Rakhal first came here, his mother-in-law brought Vishweswari, his wife. I wanted to see if she would stand in the way of Rakhal's devotion to God. I carefully examined her physical features and saw that there was no cause for fear. She represented an auspicious aspect of the divine Shakti and wouldn't be an obstacle to her husband's spiritual journey. I sent word to the nahabat [i.e. to Ma Sarada] to give Vishweswari a rupee and unveil her face.

Ah, what a nice character Rakhal has developed! Look at his face and every now and then you will notice his lips moving. Inwardly he repeats the name of God, and so his lips move. ... Ah, what a sweet nature Rakhal has nowadays! And why shouldn't it be so? If the yam is a good one, its shoots also become good.

Youngsters like him belong to the class of the ever-perfect. They are born with God-Consciousness. No sooner do they grow a little older than they realize the danger of coming in contact with the world. There is the parable of the homa bird in the Vedas. The bird lives high up in the sky and never descends to earth. It lays its egg in the sky, and the egg begins to fall. But the bird lives in such a high region that the egg hatches while falling. The fledgling comes out and continues to fall. But it is still so high that while falling it grows wings and its eyes open. Then the young bird perceives that it is dashing down toward the earth and will be instantly killed. The moment it sees the ground, it turns and shoots up toward its mother in the sky. Then its one goal is to reach its mother. Youngsters like Rakhal are like that bird. From their very childhood they are afraid of the world, and their one thought is how to reach the Mother, how to realize God.

When Rakhal did anything wrong, I scolded him. One day, he took butter from the temple prasad and ate it, without waiting for me. "How greedy you are," I said. "You ought to have learnt, from being here, to control yourself!" He shrank into himself with fear and never did that again ... And he was jealous too, like a child. He simply couldn't bear it if I loved anyone but him. I was afraid he would do himself harm by being jealous of the people the Divine Mother brought to this place. What a wonderfully childlike nature Rakhal had! Every little while he ran to me, jumped on my lap and behaved just like a baby! He never wanted to leave my side. The very sight of me used to evoke in him a childlike feeling that cannot be described. It impressed everyone who saw him. I, too, would have a corresponding feeling roused in me, and sometimes I fed him with butter and sweets, and played with him as a mother plays with her child to

keep him happy. Often I'd carry him around on my shoulders.

(Pointing to Rakhal) you are so simple! Ah, who will look after you after I am gone.

Three years after Rakhal first came to Dakshineswar, he fell ill and went to Vrindavan with Balaram [for a change of climate]. Shortly before that, I saw in a vision that the Divine Mother was removing him from here. I sincerely prayed: 'Mother, Rakhal is a mere boy. He is ignorant, so he sometimes becomes piqued. For the sake of Your work, if you want to remove him from here for a short time, please keep him in a good place and in a blissful mood. Shortly after that he had to go to Vrindavan.

I can't express how anxious I became when I heard of Rakhal's illness in Vrindavan. The Divine Mother had shown me that Rakhal had truly been—one of the cowherd companions of Krishna. Generally when a great soul was previously born in a sacred place and in a following incarnation returns to that place and remembers his divine identity, he leaves his present body. So I was afraid that Rakhal would give up his body in Vrindavan. I prayed intently to the Mother, and She comforted me with an assurance. The Mother has revealed many things to me about Rakhal. I am forbidden to tell some of them.

Rakhal has written from Vrindavan that it is a grand place—the peacocks dance around. Now let the peacocks take care of him. He has really put me in a fix. He has been staying with Balaram at Vrindavan.

Rakhal is now enjoying his 'pension'. Since his return from Vrindavan he has been staying at home. His wife is there. But he said to me that he would not accept any work even if he were offered a salary of a thousand rupees. He would lie down here and say to me that he didn't care even for my company. He was then passing through such an exalted state.

Rakhal is getting into such a spiritual mood that he can't do anything even for himself. I have to get water for him. He isn't of much service to me.

Rakhal now lives here as one of the family. I know that he will never again be attached to the world. He says that worldly enjoyments have become tasteless to him. His wife came here on her way to Konnagar. She is fourteen. He too was asked to go to Konnagar, but he didn't go. He said, 'I don't like merriment and gaiety.'

Rakhal has now understood what is good and what is bad, what is real and what is unreal. He lives with his family, no doubt, but he knows what it means. He has a wife. And a son has been born to him. But he has realized that all these are illusory and impermanent. Rakhal will never be attached to the world. He is like mudfish. The fish lives in the mud, but there is not the slightest trace of mud on its body.

(Addressing to Naren) please do not intimidate Rakhal. He is afraid of you. He believes now in God with forms. How are you going to change him? Everyone cannot realize the formless aspect of God at the very beginning.

Rakhal asked me if he could take the food left on his father's plate. 'What do you mean? I said. 'What have you become that you cannot?' But it is also true that good people won't give anyone, even a dog, the food from their plates.

Rakhal had his first religious ecstasy while sitting here massaging my feet. A Bhagavat scholar had been expounding the sacred book in the room. As Rakhal listened to his words, he shuddered every now and then. Then he became altogether still. His second ecstasy was at Balaram's house. In that state he could not keep himself sitting upright; he lay flat on the floor. Rakhal belongs to the realm of the Personal God. He leaves the place if one talks about the Impersonal. I have taken a vow to worship the Divine Mother when he recovers. You see, he has renounced his home and relatives and completely surrendered himself to me. It was I who sent him to his wife now and then. He still had a little desire for enjoyment.

Mother, what is it that Thou dost reveal to me through Rakhal and others? The form is disappearing. But Mother, what people call 'man' is only a pillow-case, nothing but a pillow-case. Consciousness is Thine alone.

Baburam

I noticed the other day that Baburam, Bhavanath, and Harish have a feminine nature. Baburam says that he likes the womanly attitude. In a vision I saw Baburam as a goddess with a necklace around her neck and with woman companions about her. He has received something in a dream. His body is pure. Only a very little effort will awaken his spiritual consciousness. (To M.)You see, I am having some difficulty about my physical needs. The nature of these attendants of mine is undergoing a change. Latu is always tense with spiritual emotion. He is about to merge himself in God. Among the youngsters Baburam and Niranjan are rather exceptional. If other boys come in the future, they will, it seems to me, receive instruction and then go away. But I don't want Baburam to tear himself away from his family. It may make trouble at home. When I ask him, 'Why don't you come?' he says, 'Why not make me come?' He looks at Rakhal and weeps. He says, 'Rakhal is very happy here.'

(To Baburam) Do stay with me. It will be very nice. In this mood I cannot allow others to touch me.

It is nice that you (pointing to Baburam) have come. Go to the Panchavati where they (referring to the devotees) are having a picnic. And Narendra has

come. Have a talk with him. When I reach the nirvikalpa state, there is no more ‘I’ or ‘you’, no more seeing or hearing, no more speaking or reasoning. Everything disappears. When the mind comes two or three steps down, a divine intoxication persists and I cannot interact with various people or things. If at that time I sit down to take my meal and fifty dishes are served to me, my hand will not move towards all of them; it will take food from one bowl only. When I am in that state, I have to mix rice, lentils, vegetables, rice pudding, and other foods together before I can eat. Sometimes I’m in such a state that I can’t touch anyone. If any one of the devotees touched me, I cry in pain. During ecstasy I reach another state, and then I can touch only Baburam. If he holds me at that time, I don’t suffer from pain. If he feeds me, I can eat.

(To Baburam) Where are your books? Aren’t you attending to your studies? (To M.) He wants to stick to both. That is very difficult. (To Baburam) What will you gain by knowing God partially? But, my child, can you attain it by holding to both? If you want that, then come away. You have no strength of mind; you haven’t much courage. Just see how the younger Naren says, ‘I will come away for good.’

Niranjan

Niranjan has said from boyhood that he will not marry. Niranjan is not attached to anything. He spends money from his own pocket to take poor patients to the hospital.

At the proposal of marriage he says, ‘Goodness! That is the whirlpool of the Vishalakshi!’ I see him seated on a light. My boy, if you allow your mind to dwell on ghosts, you will become a ghost yourself. If you fix your mind on God,your life will be filled with God.

(To Niranjan) Look here, my boy, if you do ninety-nine good deeds for a person and one bad, he will remember the bad one and won’t care for you anymore. On the other hand, if you commit sins ninety-nine times but do one thing to God’s satisfaction, He will forgive all your wrongdoing. This is the difference between the love of a man and the love of God. Remember this.

Niranjan, my boy, the days are flying fast. When will you realize God? This life will be in vain if you do not realize Him. When will you devote your mind wholly to God! Oh, how anxious I am for you!

This boy (pointing to Niranjan) is absolutely guileless. One cannot be guileless without a great deal of spiritual discipline in previous births. A hypocritical and calculating mind can never attain God. I feel as if a dark veil

has covered your face. It is because you have accepted a job in an office. One must keep accounts there. Besides, one must attend to many other things, and that always keeps the mind in a state of worry. You are serving in an office like other worldly people; but there is a slight difference, in that you are earning money for the sake of your mother. If you had accepted the job for the sake of wife and children, I should have said: ‘Fie upon you! Shame! A thousand shames!’

(To Niranjan) Look, I am now in such a state that whoever sees me in this condition will attain liberation in this life by the grace of the Divine Mother. But know for certain that it will shorten my life.

(To Niranjan) You are my father; I shall sit on your lap.

Niranjan always keeps his accounts clear. He will be able to go whenever he hears the call.

Tarak

(To TARAK) WELL, so many people come here. I seldom ask anyone about his home and family, or desire to know anything about these things. But when I first met you I felt that you belonged here, that I would like to know the particulars of your home, parents, and the like.

(To Tarak) Look, don’t be too close to Nityagopal. His path is different; he does not belong to this place.

Sashi and Sarat

IN A VISION I saw Sashi and Sarat had been among the followers of Christ.

(To Sashi) What are you doing? Never tear the cloth in that way. The serpent power (kundalini shakti), which is within me, may snap at you. Be careful.

(To Sashi) If you practise even one-sixteenth part of what I have practised, you will surely reach the goal.

(To Sashi) God may come at any time, but this need not frighten us. When the king wishes to visit one of his servants, he knows the servant will not have soft cushions and the proper things with which to receive him, so the day before he comes, he sends other servants to cleanse everything and prepare for his reception. Similarly, God, before He comes to the heart, sends servants to make it ready for His coming. And who are those servants? Purity, chastity, humility, loving-kindness. Or again, as in the east the red glow in the sky tells us that the sun is about to rise, so just by looking at a man one can tell whether God will come soon to him.

(To Sashi) Look, you boys have tied me with this loving service. If you let me

go, then only can I go. Within me are two persons. One is the Divine Mother, and the other is Her devotee. It is the devotee that has been taken ill.

(To Sarat) If you become a doctor, I shall not be able to eat from your hand.

Harinath

(To Harinath) YOU talk like a fool! Looking down upon women! Why? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them with respect. That is the only way to escape from their snares.

(To Harinath) Hello, I hear that nowadays you are studying and discussing Vedanta Philosophy. That is good, of course. But tell me, what is the teaching of Vedanta? Is it not that Brahman alone is real and the world unreal? Isn't that its substance? Or does it say something else? Then why don't you give up the unreal and cling to the real?

(To Harinath) What is there in the scriptures? They are like sheets of paper with a shopping list on them. The list is useful only to check off the items once purchased. When you have done that, the list is thrown away. So you should check your knowledge, your devotion, and consult the scriptures to see whether they agree. It is said, 'When you have knowledge of the Absolute, the scriptures are worth only a straw.'

(To Harinath) Those who seek nirvana are selfish and small-minded. They are full of fear. They are like those parcheesi players who are always eager to reach home. An amateur player, once he sends his piece home, doesn't like to bring it out again. Such players are unskilled. But an adept player is never afraid of coming out again, if by doing so he gets the opportunity to capture an opponent. Then he rolls the right number and returns home once more. It seems that whenever he rolls the dice, the right number comes up for him. So do not fear. Play without any fear. By Mother's grace everything takes place.

(To Harinath) Go to the Panchavati. Some devotees had a picnic there. See if they have left anything behind. If you find anything, bring it here ... If you want to serve properly, you should completely forget yourself.

(To Harinath) Well, the tendency of my mind is always towards the Infinite. It is by such rajasic devices (having dinner with a number of bowls containing various cooked items) that I hold it down to the lower planes. Otherwise I could not talk with you.

(To Harinath) I want to see you quite often, for I know you are dear to the Lord. Otherwise why should I spend my time on you? You can't give me anything worth even a cent; and when I go to your house, you can't even spread a torn mat for me to sit on. Yet I love you so much. Don't forget to come here,

because here you will get everything that is needed for your spiritual life. If you can find elsewhere opportunities for God-realization, you may go there. What I want is that you should realize God— that you should transcend the misery of the world and enjoy divine bliss; that you should attain Him in this life. The Divine Mother tells me if you only come here, you will realize God without any effort. That is why I ask you to see me so often.

Latu

Ram, did you bring this boy (referring to Latu) with you? Where did you get him (pointing to Latu)? I see some holy signs in him.

There is Leto. He bends his head, resting it on the palm of his hand. I see that it is God Himself who rests His head on His hand.

Look at this boy (pointing to Latu). He is weeping and won't tell me anything.

When I say to Latu, 'Go home,' he laughs and tells me, 'If I stay here my master won't be angry. I don't want to leave.' 'What is all this? Why should he stay here and forget his duties? Come now, Ram, you try to convince him of what I say.'

(To Latu) Be careful about wine and about lust and gold. These things are obstacles that create doubts about God. A person who meditates after taking intoxicants and a yogi who is attached to women are both hypocrites and only deceive themselves.

Leto, can you say whether God sleeps or not? Everyone in the world sleeps, but God does not; for if God slept, the universe would be plunged into darkness and would dissolve. God must remain awake day and night taking care of his creatures, so that they can sleep without fear.

I saw two bhairavas [guardian spirits] protecting you disguised as two dogs. You are very fortunate! The Divine Mother sent those spirits to protect you.

Can one do japam with the mind full of desires? When sitting to meditate one should not ask for anything ... If Mother ever insists on giving you something, then ask only for devotion to Her. Never ask for wealth, power, sense pleasures, or anything else.

Do you know what your Lord Rama is doing now? Your Lord Rama is now passing an elephant through the eye of a needle. Always keep your mind spotless. Don't allow impure thoughts to enter it. If you find such desires tormenting you, pray to God and chant His name. If the mind still will not remain calm, then go to the temple of the Mother and sit before Her. Or else come here (pointing to himself).

(To Latu) It is not good to speak harshly to those who come here. They are

tormented with worldly problems. If they come here and then are scolded for their shortcomings, where will they go? In the presence of holy company never use harsh words to anyone, and never say anything to cause pain to another.

Kali Prasad

IT IS A good sign that you have a desire to learn yoga at this young age. You were a yogi in your previous life. A little was left for perfection. This will be your last birth. Yes, I shall teach you yoga. Rest tonight and come to me again tomorrow morning.

Ah, you have seen *Vaikuntha* [the abode of Vishnu]! Henceforth you will no longer have these visions. You have risen to the formless state.

It is you who have introduced the habit of reading among the boys. You should know that book-learning is of no value. If you want to kill yourself, a nail-cutter can serve the purpose. But if you want to kill others, you need swords, shields, and other weapons. Study is necessary for that purpose. Those who will teach people are to read books.

Hello, I hear you have become an atheist. Do you believe in God? Do you accept the validity of the scriptures? ... A day will come when you will know and accept everything; but don't be one-sided. I don't care for one-sidedness.

Buro (*Elder*) Gopal

(To elder Gopal) As long as a man feels that God is 'there', he is ignorant. But he attains Knowledge when he feels that God is 'here. What a man seeks is very near him. Still he wanders about from place to place.

Do you think I am asking you to stroke my legs because they are aching? Oh, no! In your previous births you did many virtuous acts; therefore I am accepting you service. ... Never tell a lie—even jokingly or casually.

You will attain a thousand times more virtue if you present those ochre clothes and rosaries to my children rather than giving them to the monks of Jagannath ghat. Where else will you find such all-renouncing monks? Each of them is equal to a thousand monks.

Subodh

When I was staying at Jhamapukur, I often visited your home as well as your Kali Temple at Thanthania. That was before your birth. I knew you would come. Well, the Divine Mother sends here those who will attain spirituality. You will attain the goal. Mother says so. Mother sends here those who will receive Her grace. Come here on Tuesdays or Saturdays. Many people from your part of

town come here on those days. Come with them.

(To M.) Two boys came here the other day. One of them was Subodh. He is Sankar Ghosh's great-grandson. The other, Kshirode, is his neighbour. They are nice boys. I told them I was ill and asked them to go to you for instruction. Please look after them a little.

Today I have taken away lust from your mind. You will not have to practise meditation. But think of me in the morning and evening.

(To Subodh) One can see God as one sees two persons talking together or walking. But one should call on God from the bottom of one's heart. Pray and cry for Him. Demand His vision From Him as children demand toys from their parents with loud cries. Remove all worldly desires from the mind. Always remember: I have a Mother and I am Her son.

Yes, yes, you will realize God; and in the future many people will learn from you.

GANGADHAR, HARI PRASANNA AND SARADA PRASANNA

O GOPAL, LISTEN TO this! This boy (pointing to Gangadhar) says that he met me when he was very young. This little one had an early boyhood!

(To Gangadhar) Did you shed tears at the time of prayer or meditation? Tears of repentance or sorrow flow from the corners of the eyes nearest the nose, and those of joy from the outer corners of the eyes.

(To Hari Prasanna) Never get involved with women. Always be careful. Let there be no stain in your character. Never look at a woman, even if she is made out of gold. Do you know why I am saying all this to you? You belong to the Divine Mother, and you will have to do a lot of work for Her. A pecked fruit cannot be offered to the Mother. So I tell you,be careful.

Sarada is now in a very good state of mind. Formerly he had a hesitant look; now his face beams with joy.

HOUSEHOLDER DISCIPLES

Ram Chandra Datta

You cannot realize God by a mere wish. Have faith in the instructions of a holy man. Make your mind like a fishing rod and your prana, or life-force, like a hook. Your devotion and japam are like bait. Eventually you will be blessed by the vision of God.'

You get what you desire. Faith alone is the key to success. The more you advance in one direction, the more you leave behind the opposite direction. If you move ten steps towards the east, you move ten steps away from the west.

What will you get by renouncing the world? Living a family life is like living in a fort. It is easier to fight an enemy from inside a fort than outside. You will be in a position to renounce the world when you can bestow three-fourths of your mind on God, but not before that.

When you bring something for me, don't give any of it to anyone else beforehand. I can't take anything without offering it to God, and I can't offer anything to Him that has been defiled by being offered to someone else first.

If you wish to see anything, look at me. You do not need to practise any more spiritual disciplines. Just come here and see me now and then, and bring with you a pice worth of something as a present. Those who serve the devotees, serve me.

How many fine qualities Ram (referring to Ram Chandra Dutta) possesses! How many devotees he serves and looks after!

Buy such a solitary garden house that if a hundred murders were committed there, no one would know it.

How is it that you have not yet taken me to the new garden you have purchased for holding kirtan? Let us go one day to your garden to see what it is like.

How nice! It is a fine place (pointing to the future 'Yogodyana'). You can easily meditate on God here.

Suppose Adhar didn't invite you to his house. Why such a fuss about going to a place where the name of the Lord was sung? One may go unasked to participate in religious music. One doesn't have to be invited.

Later your mind will be your guru and will give you the proper guidance whenever you are faced with life's problems.

Do not publish my biography now. If you do, my body will not last long.

Surendra Nath Mitra

(To Surendra) Come here every now and then. One should constantly live in the company of holy men. The renunciation of 'woman and gold' is for sannyasis. It is not for you. Now and then you should go into solitude and call on God with a yearning heart. Your renunciation should be mental.

For you, as Chaitanya said, the disciplines to be practised are kindness to living beings, service to the devotees, and chanting the name of God.

Why do I say all this to you? You work in a merchant's office. I say this to you because you have many duties to perform there. You tell lies at the office. Then why do I eat the food you offer me? Because you give money in charity, you give away more than you earn.

Surendra wanted to spend the night here occasionally. He brought a bed and even spent a day or two here. Then his wife said to him, ‘You may go anywhere you like during day-time, but at night you must not leave home!’ What could poor Surendra do? Now he has no way of spending the night away from home.

(To Surendra) One should give something to monks and devotees. Those who have means should help such persons when they meet them,

May the blissful Mother make your life blissful.

Once I saw you (pointing to Surendra) in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother. You have both—yoga and bhoga; otherwise your countenance would look dry.

What a nice disposition Surendra has now! He is very outspoken, he isn’t afraid to speak the truth. He is unstinting in his liberality. No one that goes to him for help comes away empty-handed.

(To Surendra) Yesterday evening (17.10.1885) at seven or seven thirty, I saw your worship hall in a vision. I saw the divine image full of effulgence. This place and your hall were joined by a stream of light flowing between them.

Balaram Basu

(POINTING TO M.) God reveals the nature of the devotees to me before they arrive. I saw Chaitanya’s party singing and dancing near the Panchavati, between the banyan tree and the bakul tree. I noticed Balaram there. If it were not for him, who would there be to supply me with sugar candy and such things? And I saw him too.

Look here, Mother has told me that you are one of us. Many things belonging to this place (meaning himself) are in your custody. Buy something and send it here.

Balaram’s food is very pure. The members of his family have for generations been devotees and been hospitable to sadhus and beggars. His father is living a retired life at Vrindavan, where he passes his time in calling upon the Lord. Not only can I take his food, but I take it with relish.

All the members of Balaram’s family are attuned to the same pitch of one ideal. From the master and mistress down to the children, all are devoted to God. They never take a drop of water without saying their prayers. They are as hospitable as pious. They belong to this place (to him). They are born with this special privilege (of serving him).

Do you know how Balaram manages a festival? He is like a miserly brahmin raising a cow. The cow must eat very little but give milk in torrents. Sing your songs and beat your own drums. That’s Balaram’s idea!

Balaram says to me, ‘Please come to Calcutta by boat; take a carriage only if you must.’ You see, he has given us a feast; so this afternoon he will make us all dance! One day he hired a carriage for me from here (Balaram’s house) to Dakshineswar. He said that the carriage hire was twelve annas. I said to him: ‘Will the coachman take me to Dakshineswar for twelve annas?’ ‘Oh, that will be plenty’, he replied. One side of the carriage broke down before we reached Dakshineswar. Besides, the horse stopped every now and then; it simply would not go. Once in a while the coachman whipped the horse, and then it ran a short distance.

Ah, what a nice nature Balaram has! It is only for my sake that he doesn’t go to Orissa, where his family owns an estate. His brother stopped his monthly allowance and wrote to him: ‘Come and stay with us here. Why should you waste so much money in Calcutta?’ But he didn’t listen. He has been living in Calcutta because he wants to see me. What devotion to God! He is busy day and night with his worship. His gardener is always making garlands of flowers for the Deity. He has decided to spend four months a year at Vrindavan to reduce his expenses. He gets a monthly allowance of two hundred rupees.

Balararn comes from a family of devout Vaishnavas. His father, now an old man, is a pious devotee. He has a tuft of hair on his head, a rosary of tulsi beads round his neck, and a string of beads in his hand. He devotes his time to the repetition of God’s name. He owns much property in Orissa and has built temples to Radha-Krishna in Kothar, Vrindavan, and other places, establishing free guest-houses as well.

Balaram was one of the companions of Chaitanya. He belongs to this place. Once while in ecstasy I watched as Chaitanya inspired a large crowd with a flood of divine love, singing kirtan with Advaita, Nityananda, and others. Balaram was in that wonderful kirtan party.

M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta)

What do you think of me? How many annas of knowledge of God have I? Have you found anyone else resembling me—any pundits or holy men?

That’s the one hobby of you Calcutta people—giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others? He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone.

The less people know about your thoughts of God, the better for you.

His (M’s) love is like that of Vibhishana, who, when he found a human form, at once dressed it in rich apparel and worshipped it by waving lights, saying,

‘This is the form of my Ramachandra.’

Mother, why have you given him (pointing to M.) only one *kala* [a small part] of power? Oh, I see. That will be sufficient for your work.

This man (pointing to M.) has no ego.

Once I saw the companions of Chaitanya in the kirtan party going from the banyan tree to the bakul tree in the Panchavati, not in a trance but with these very eyes. Formerly I was in such an exalted state of mind that I could see all these things with my naked eyes; but now I see them in samadhi. I think I saw you (pointing to M.) there, and Balaram too. You must have noticed that when I see certain people I jump up with a start. Do you know why? A man feels that way when he sees his own people after a long time.

I was coming to look for you (pointing to M.). Because of your delay I thought you might have scaled the wall and run away. I watched your eyes this morning and felt apprehensive lest you should go away like Narayan Shastri. Then I said to myself: ‘No, he won’t run away. He thinks a great deal before doing anything.’

(To M.) But how can you love someone unless you know him? One does not seek bhakti of one’s own accord without inborn tendencies. This is the characteristics of prema-bhakti. There is another kind of bhakti, called jnana-bhakti, which is love of God based on reasoning.

Girish Chandra Ghosh

One day, when I was meditating in the Kali temple, I saw a naked boy skipping into the temple. He had a tuft of hair on the crown of his head, and was carrying a flask of wine under his left arm and a vessel of nectar in his right hand.

‘Who are you?’ I asked. ‘I am Bhairava [the chief of Shiva’s host]’, he replied. On my asking the reason for his coming, he answered, ‘To do your work’. Years later when Girish came to me, I recognized that Bhairava in him.

(To Girish) Ah! You have written nice plays. You assimilate a great deal. The other day I said to you that no one could sketch a divine character unless he had love of God in his heart. People will learn much from your plays.

I found that it was God Himself who was acting the different parts (of the performance ‘Prahlada Charitra’). Those who played the female parts seemed to me the direct embodiments of the Blissful Mother, and the cowherd boys of Goloka the embodiments of Narayana Himself. It was God alone who had become all these.

There is no harm on the part of a devotee in keeping a trace of ego. That trace of ego is kept in order to enjoy God. You can enjoy divine bliss only when you

make a distinction between yourself and God—the distinction between the servant and the Master. Have faith in the Divine Mother and you will attain everything.

The other day I told you the meaning of bhakti. It is to adore God with body, mind, and words. ‘With body’ means to serve and worship God with one’s hands, go to holy places with one’s feet, hear the chanting of the name and glories of God with one’s ears, and behold the divine image with one’s eyes. ‘With mind’ means to contemplate and meditate on God constantly and to remember and think of His Lila. ‘With words’ means to sing hymns to Him and chant His name and glories. You must remember another thing: in the ocean there is danger of alligators, that is to say, of lust and the like. Give God your power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He likes.

Do you know what the guru is? He is like a matchmaker. A matchmaker arranges for the union of the bride with bride-groom. Likewise, Guru prepares for the meeting of the individual soul with his Beloved, the Divine Spirit. You need not worry. Your guru has already been chosen, and the rnantram is the name of God.

You may wash a thousand times a cup that has held a solution of garlic; but is it ever possible to get rid of the smell altogether? (But) All smell disappears when a blazing fire is lighted. If you heat a cup smelling of garlic, you get rid of the smell; it becomes a new cup.

Why is Girish Ghosh so abusive? Why does he use such vulgar language to me? In my present state of mind I cannot bear such rudeness. When a thunderbolt strikes near a house, the heavy things inside the house are not much affected, but the window-panes rattle. Nowadays I cannot bear such roughness. A man living on the plane of sattva cannot bear noise and uproar. That is why Hriday was sent away. It was the Divine Mother who sent him away. During the latter part of his stay he went to extremes; he became very rough and abusive.

(To Girish) You utter many abusive and vulgar words; but that doesn’t matter. It is better for these things to come out. There are some people who fall ill on account of blood-poisoning; the more the poisoned blood finds an outlet, the better it is for them. At the time the upadhi of a man is being destroyed, it makes a loud noise, as it were. Wood crackles when it burns; there is no more noise when the burning is over. You will be purer day by day. You will improve very much day by day. People will marvel at you. I may not come many more times; but that doesn’t matter. You will succeed by yourself.

Well, Girish, what have you found in me that you proclaim me before all as an Incarnation? What more shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined!

WOMEN DEVOTEES

Lakshmi Devi

Lakshmi is a partial incarnation of Shitala, who is a spirited goddess, while the person who has married her is an ordinary human being. It is not possible for him to enjoy Lakshmi. Only if Lord Shiva would incarnate as a man then she could be his wife. Now she is definitely going to be a widow.'

Do your duties (pointing to Lakshmi Devi) and practise religion at home. Do not travel to the holy places by yourself. Who knows who might harm you? Live with your aunt (Sri Sarada Devi). Life in the world is not safe.

Go from door to door and spread the Lord's name. People may criticize you (pointing to Lakshmi Devi and M.'s wife), but still their homes will get the touch of your blessed feet, and this will bring good to them.

Yogin-Ma

She is a gopi, perfected by God's grace.

(To Yogin Ma) Look, your Chosen Deity is in this place (pointing to his body). If you think of me, that will bring recollectedness of your Chosen Deity.

That girl (referring to Yogin-Ma) with nice large eyes, who comes here frequently, loves you (pointing to the Holy Mother) very much. She wept a lot at the nahabat when you left for home.

He (referring to her husband Ambika Charan) is an unfortunate wretch. A householder has duties to discharge, his debts to pay: his debt to the gods, his debt to his ancestors, his debt to the rishis, and his debt to his wife and children. If a wife is chaste, then her husband should support her; he should also bring up their children, until they are of age.

(To Yogin-Ma) Blissful Mother! Blissful Mother! O Mother, why don't you come with me? Why don't you surrender to Him? Be like a leaf in a gale. Do you know what that is like? A fallen leaf lies on the ground and moves about as the wind carries it. Similarly, one should depend on God. Let the wind move as the power of divine consciousness moves it. That is all.

You have seen me, fed me, and served me. What else do you need? Don't worry. The thousand-petalled lotus of your seventh plane (sahasrara) will bloom at the time of your death. At the devotees' last moment I shall have to appear before them. Otherwise, how will they get liberation?

Gauri-Ma

If you (pointing to Gauri-Ma) had met me earlier, would you have practised so much austerity?

Gauri is a perfect soul—a gopi of Vrindavan. The condition of women in this country is very poor. You (pointing to Gauri-Ma) will have to work for them.You will have to work in the city (Calcutta). You have practised enough spiritual disciplines. Now you should serve the women with your spiritual energy.

She was very close to me for such a long time, but she won't see me anymore. I have a deep feeling for her.

Nistarini Ghosh

What? you (pointing to Nistarini) want to feed me with your own hand? All right. Feed me.

She is a great soul. She is a partial incarnation of one of the ten forms of the Divine Mother. Through the influence of his wife, Navagopal escaped from maya.

Hello, what have you brought for me? Ah! What a nice child (referring to child Nirode, later Sw. Ambikananda)! You offer it to me? Good! Take care of this child now, but know that he belongs to me. In due time I will take him back.

(To Nistarini) The picture of this body (referring to the Master's picture in shrine pose) would travel in railway carriages and on ocean steamers and by bearers, and people would carry it in their pockets and even on their watch chains.

Gopaler-Ma

During krishna's incarnation she (referring to Gopaler-Ma) was a fruit-seller of Vrindavan, and she would feed Gopala the sweet fruits.

(To Gopaler-Ma) Oh, you have come! Please give me what you have brought for me. Why do you spend money on sweets? Prepare some sweet coconut balls, and when you visit this place, bring one or two of them with you. Or you may bring a little of the ordinary dishes that you cook yourself—a hodge-podge curry with pumpkin leaves or a preparation with potatoes, eggplants, drumsticks, and little balls of mashed legumes. I want to eat your cooking.

(To Gopaler-Ma) The pressure built up by the spiritual energy generated during your meditation on Hari has caused this (heart palpitations and difficult breathing). How will you pass your time if you remove the cause? When you feel too much pain, please eat something.

Look, she is engulfed in bliss. Her mind is now in the abode of Gopala.

(To Gopaler-Ma) Why do you practise so much japa now? You have attained plenty of visions! It is no longer necessary for you to practise japa and austerity for yourself. But you may continue these disciplines for the welfare of this body

(pointing to himself).

That brahmin woman who comes from Kamarhati loves God as her Gopala. She has had many visions. She said that Gopala extended his hand to her and demanded to be fed. After she had that vision, she came to Dakshineswar one day, overwhelmed with ecstasy and devotion. She calmed down a little after eating some food. I asked her to stay that night, but she refused. When she was ready to return to Kamarhati, she again entered that intoxicated state. Her upper cloth was dragging on the ground, but she was not aware of this, I put the cloth back on her shoulder and gently stroked her head. She has tremendous faith and devotion.

The brahmani of Kamarhati sees many visions. She lives all by herself in a lonely room in a garden on the bank of the Ganges. She spends her time in japa. Gopala (The Baby Krishna) sleeps with her. It is not imagination, but fact. She saw that Gopala's palms were red. He walks with her. She suckles Him at her breast. They talk to each other. When Narendra heard the story he wept.

(To Gopaler-Ma) In this Kali yuga if one has such visions continuously, one's body does not last long. It survives twenty-one days only and then drops off like a dry leaf.

Golap-Ma

Ah, how could you come here (to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar)? Ah, I ate almost all of the sweet you gave me; only a little was left over. It did not make me sick. My stomach was just a little heavy.

Only one who is endowed with renunciation realizes God. One who is satified simply with another devotee's hospitality and leaves empty-handed—that person sits very close to God.

LAST WORDS

Dakshineswar temple garden, December 24 1883: I am at peace now. I shall have to be born once more. Therefore I am not giving all knowledge to my companions. Suppose I give all knowledge; will you then come to me again so willingly? I recognized you (pointing to M.) on hearing you read the Chaitanya Bhagavat. You are my own. The same substance, like father and son. All of you are coming here again. When you pull one part of the kalmi creeper, all the branches come toward you. You are all relatives—like brothers. Would you live separately? Before you came here, you didn't know who you were. Now you will know. It is God who, as the guru, makes one know.

Balaram Bose's house, May 9, 1885: There is no one else here; so I am telling

this. He who from the depth of his soul seeks to know God will certainly realize God. He must. He alone who is restless for God and seeks nothing but Him will certainly realize God. Those who belong to this place(the inner circle of the Master's devotees) have already come. Those who will come from now on are outsiders. Such people will come now and then. The Divine Mother will tell them: 'Do this. Call on God in this way.'

Dakshineswar temple garden, own room, June 13, 1885: Birth and death are like magic you see the magic for a second and then it disappears. God alone is real and all else unreal.

Water alone is real; its bubbles appear and disappear. They disappear into the very water from which they rise. God is like an ocean, and living beings are its bubbles. They are born there and they die there. Children are like the few small bubbles around a big one.

Balaram Bose's house, July 28 1885: Perhaps there is a meaning in what has happened to my throat. This has happened lest I should make myself light before all; lest I should go to all sorts of places and sing and dance.

Dakshineswar temple garden, August 9 1885: It will be sufficient for the youngsters who come here if they know only two things. If they know these, they will not have to practise much discipline and austerity. First, who I am, and second, who they are. Many of the youngsters belong to the inner circle. Those belonging to the inner circle will not attain liberation. I shall have to assume a human body again, in a northwesterly direction after two hundred years. Then many will be liberated, and those who fail at that time will have to wait a long time for liberation.

Do you know why I have this illness? It has the same significance. Those whose devotion to me has a selfish motive behind it will run away at the sight of my illness.

Dakshineswar temple garden, own room, September 20 1885: I cannot ask God to cure my disease. The attitude of the servant-master relationship is nowadays less strong in me. Once in a while I say, 'O Mother, please mend the sheath of the sword a little.' But such prayers arc also becoming less frequent. Nowadays I do not find my I; I see that it is God alone who resides in this sheath. Every now and then I think that the body is a mere pillow-case. The only real substance is the Indivisible Satchidananda. When I go into divine ecstasy, this illness of the throat remains away from me. I am now somewhat in that mood and so I feel like laughing.

Cossipore, December 23 1885: My teaching of others is coming to an end. I cannot give any more instruction. I see that everything is Rama Himself. And

sometimes I say to myself, ‘Whom shall I teach?’ This illness is showing who belong to the inner circle and who to the outer. Those who are living here, renouncing the world, belong to the inner circle; and those who pay occasional visits and ask, ‘How are you, sir?’ belong to the outer circle.

Latu counted thirty-one devotees in all. That’s not many, But a few more are becoming devotees through Vijay and Kedar.

It was revealed to me in a vision that during my last days I should have to live on pudding. During my present illness my wife was one day feeding me with pudding. I burst into tears and said, ‘Is this my living on pudding near the end, and so painfully?’

Dakshineswar Kali Temple, own room, 1885: When you (pointing to Holy Mother) find me accepting food from anyone and everyone, spending nights in Calcutta, and feeding a portion of food first to someone else, then eating what is left—then know that the day I will leave this body is near. Towards the end I shall eat rice pudding only and nothing else.

Cossipore, January 1, 1886: What more need I tell you? I bless you all. May you all be illumined!

Cossipore, March 14 1886:1 have gone on suffering so much for fear of making you all weep. But if you all say: ‘Oh, there is so much suffering! Let the body die’, then I may give up the body. The illness is of the body. That is as it should be; I see that the body is made of five elements. I am seeing many forms of God. Among them I find this one also (meaning his own form).

Cossipore, March 15 1886: I see right now that it is God Himself who has become all this. It seems to me that men and other living beings are made of leather, and that it is God Himself who, dwelling inside these leather cases, moves the hands, the feet, the heads.

If the body were to be preserved a few days more, many people would have their spirituality awakened. But this is not to be. Such is not the will of God. This time the body will not be preserved, lest, finding me guileless and foolish, people should take advantage of me, and lest I, guileless and foolish as I am, should give away everything to everybody. In this Kaliyuga people are averse to meditation and japa.

There are two persons in this. One is the Divine Mother, and the other is Her devotee. It is the devotee who broke his arm, and it is the devotee who is now ill. Alas! To whom shall I say all this? Who will understand me? God becomes man, an Avatar, and comes to earth with His devotees. And the devotees leave the world with Him.

A band of minstrels suddenly appears, dances, and sings, and it departs in the same sudden manner. They come and they return, but none recognizes them.

Suffering is inevitable when one assumes a human body. Every now and then I say to myself, ‘May I not have to come back to earth again!’ But there is something else. This assuming of a human body is for the sake of the devotees.

Cossipore, April 22, 1886: I don’t remember when the current went up. Now I am in the mood of a child. That is why I am playing with the flowers this way.

You all seem to me to be my kinsmen. I do not look on any of you as a stranger. The attributes of matter are superimposed on Spirit, and the attributes of Spirit are superimposed on matter. Therefore when the body is ill a man says, ‘I am ill.’

My mood is changing. I think that I should not say to everyone, ‘May your spiritual consciousness be awakened.’ People are so sinful in the Kaliyuga; if I awaken their spiritual consciousness I shall have to accept the burden of their sins.

Cossipore garden house, own room, 1886: Before I leave the world, I’ll cast my whole secret to the winds (revealing himself publicly as a god man). When many people know (my divine glory) and whisper about it, this case (my body) will cease to exist. It will fall to pieces according to the Mother’s will. At that time (during my illness) it will be determined who among the devotees belong to the inner circle and who to the outer circle.

Dakshineswar Kali Temple, own room, 1886: (On coming back to outer consciousness from Samadhi) I was in the land of the white people. Their skin is white, their hearts are white and they are simple and sincere. It is a very beautiful country. I think I shall go there.

Cossipore garden house, own room, 1886: I told the Divine Mother that I could not swallow any food on account of the sore in my throat, and asked Her to do something about it. But the Mother said, pointing to you all, “Why, are you not eating enough through all these mouths?” I felt so humiliated that I could not utter another word.

Cossipore garden house, own room, 1886: O Naren, today I have given you everything I possess—now I am no more than a fakir, a penniless beggar. By the powers I have transmitted to you, you will accomplish great things in the world, and not until then will you return to the source whence you have come.

Cossipore garden house, own room, 1886: O my Naren, are you still not convinced? He who in the past was born as Rama and Krishna, verily is He now Ramakrishna in this body. And that not merely from the standpoint of your Vedanta!

If any good comes from my lips, it is the Mother who speaks. What have I to

do with it? When the lotus opens, the bees come of their own accord to seek the honey; so let the lotus of your character be full-blown and the results will follow.

Religion can be given and taken more tangibly, more really than anything else in the world.

I do not care. I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man.

This mind has been given to the Lord, do you mean to say that I should take it back and put it upon the body, which is but a mere cage of the soul? While I can speak I must teach them.

One must learn to put oneself into another man's very soul.

As long as I live, so long I learn.

Do not care for doctrines. Do not care for dogmas or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence in each man, which is spirituality, and the more this is developed in a man,the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Be spiritual and realize truth for yourself.

The name of Her whom I call my Mother, shall I tell that secret to the world? (lit. shall I break the pot before the market?) Even then who knows her? Lo, the six philosophies were not able to find out Kali!

It was about 8 o'clock at night on Sunday, the 9th August, 1885. M., Rakhal, Mahimacharan and a few other devotees were sitting on the floor of Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar. The Master came down from his bed to Mahimacharan and said to him :

"I have long thought of telling you one thing, but have never done so yet. I want to tell you today. It is about my spiritual condition. You say that whoever will practise *Sadhana* will realize it. That is not so. There is some speciality about it."

This declaration of the Master filled the devotees with great wonder. They listened with bated breath: The Master continued :

"She, Mother has *spoken* to me. I have not merely seen Her—She has also talked with me. I was at the *Vat-tala*. She came out of the Ganga to me. Oh, how She laughed ! She played with my fingers and cracked them in fun. And then She spoke—She talked with me !

"I cried for three days at a time.—And She revealed to me all the contents of the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and *Tantras.*

"One day She showed me the secret of the fascination of *Maya.* A small light appeared in my room. Then it began to grow larger and larger. At fast it engulfed

the whole world.

"I was also shown the vision of a large tank covered with waterhyacinth. The wind blew and removed some of the plants and water reappeared. But very soon the removed plants came back dancing and recovered the exposed water. It was indicated that the water was the *Satchidananda*, the waterhyacinth the *Maya* which abstructs the vision. Even if there are momentary glimpses of *Satchidananda, Mdya* covers Him again.

''I am shown what kinds of devotees would visit me even before they come here. I was shown the *Sankirtan* procession of Chaitanyadeva winding between the *Vat-tala* and *Vakul-tala*. In it I saw Balaram and also him (M.).

"I had a vision of Keshab Sen even before I met him. I saw in a state of *Samadhi,* the vision of Keshab and his followers. A crowd of people sat before me, filling the room. Keshab was looking like a peacock spreading its tail. This spread out tail was his followers. A red gem glittered on his head, which was a sign of *rajas*. Keshab was saying to his followers : 'Listen to what he is saying.I said to Mother : 'Mother, they are votaries of English ideas. Why should I talk to them?' Mother explained to me that such things would happen in this *Kali-yuga*. And they took the name of Hari and Kali from here. That is why Mother took away Vijay from Keshab's church. But She did not go to the Adi (Brahmo) Samaj.

"(Pointing to himself) There is something in this. Many days ago, a boy named Gopal Sen used to visit me. He who is in this, placed His foot on his chest. Gopal went into ecstasy and said : 'It will be long before you can come. I cannot live any more among the worldly-minded.' He bade me adieu and went home. Afterwards I learnt that he had given up his body.

"I had all wonderful visions. I saw the Undivided Existence-Knowledge-Bliss in which there was a partition. On one side were Kedar, Chuni and other devotees who believed in God with forms. On the other side was an effulgent light as brightly red as brickdust. Within this light sat Narendra immersed in *Samadhi*. Seeing him thus absorbed, I called him by name. He slightly opened his eyes and I came to know that he had been born in this form in a *Kayastha* family of Simla [Calcutta]. Then I prayed to Mother, saying : 'Mother bind him with *Maya*, or he will give up his body in *Samadhi.'* Kedar who believes in the form of God peeped over at Narendra, then got up and fled away.

"That is why I think that the Mother Herself has been born and is playing within this [his body] as a devotee. When I first reached this state, my body became effulgent. My chest assumed a red hue. I then prayed to Mother, 'Mother, do not manifest Thyself outside, repair within.' That is why I have got such a poor body now. Otherwise people would not have given me peace. There

would have been crowds of people about me if I had that effulgent body. There is no outward manifestation now. Worthless people go away. Only those who are pure devotees will remain. Why have I this illness ? It also has the same significance.

“I had a desire to be the prince of devotees and I prayed to the Mother accordingly. Again, the desire arose in my mind that those who had called sincerely on the Lord, must come here —they must. You see that is what is happening —those very people are coming.

“My father knew who was in me. He had a dream at Gaya in which Raghuvir appeared and said : T shall be your son.’

“Even He is dwelling within me. Renunciation of *Kamini* and *Kanchana*—Is that possible for me ? I have not experienced sexual intercourse even in dream !

“The naked one [Tota Puri] instructed me in the *Vedanta*. In three days I realized *Samadhi*, When he saw my *Samadhi,* he exclaimed : ‘Oh, what is this? Later on he came to know who was in me and asked me to let him go. On hearing him I went into ecstasy and said : ‘No, you cannot go on any account, until I have fully realized the *Vedanta.’* After that, day and night I lived with him and discussed *Vedanta,* The Brahmani said : “*Baba,* do not discuss *Vedanta,* this will impair your devotion.’

‘I said to Mother : ‘Mother, how will this body be maintained, and how can I live with *Sddhus* and devotees ? Provide me a rich man. That is why Sejo Babu [Mathuranath] served me for fourteen years.

“He who is within this, informs me beforehand to what spiritual planes the coming devotees belong. When I see the vision of Gouranga before me, I know that a devotee of Gouranga is coming. If a *Shakta* is to come, 1 have the vision of *Shakti*—Kali.

“At the time of the evening service in the temple, I used to go to the roof of the *Kuthi* and cry : ‘Oh, where are you? Come, come!’ See they are all coming by and by. He Himself is dewlling within this ; and is communing with the devotees.

‘’And the devotees themselves !—What wonderful states are theirs! Naren junior has his breath stopped automatically. He also goes into *Samddhi* in which he remains sometimes for two and half hours and sometimes even more. How wonderful !

“I have performed all kinds of *Sadhana,—Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga,* and also *Hatha Yoga* for increasing the span of life. There is someone within this. Or how am I able to live with devotees after having realized the highest *Samadhi ?* Koar Singh said : ‘I have not seen another man return from

Samadhi. You are Nanak himself !’

“All around me are wordly people and *Kamini-kanchana* and yet I have such spiritual conditions and there are countinued *Samadhi* and ecstasy ! That is why Pratap [Mazumdar], seeing my *Samddhi* on the steamer when Cook Saheb came, said : ‘Oh, he appears like one possessed !”

PILGRIMAGE

WHEN I VISITED the northwestern parts of India, I saw the same things there as here: the same mango trees, tamarind trees, and bamboo groves were there as here. Seeing that, I told Hriday: ‘O Hriday, what is there is here too. Only when I observe the excreta in the meadows, it seems that the digestive power of these people is greater than that of people in other places.’

I expected to find everyone in Varanasi absorbed in samadhi, meditating on Shiva twenty-four hours a day, and everyone in Vrindaban wild with ecstatic joy in the company of Krishna. But when I went to those places, I found them to be different.

(At Manikarnika Ghat) I saw a tall white figure with tawny matted hair steadily approach each funeral pyre in turn, carefully raise each individual soul from its cast-off body, and whisper into its ear the particular name of Brahman that liberates a soul. Seated on the opposite side of the pyre, the all-powerful Divine Mother Kali untied the gross, subtle, and causal knots of bondage created by each individual soul, thus sending the soul to the Absolute by opening the gate of liberation. Lord Vishwanath was blessing those souls by bestowing in an instant the experience of nondual, infinite bliss that people can attain only after ages of concentration and austerity.

I found in him (Trailanga Swami) the living manifestation of Vishwanath. Varanasi was sanctified and made vibrant by his presence. He was in an exalted state of knowledge. He had no body-consciousness...I cooked rice pudding and brought it with me to feed him. At that time he couldn’t speak to me because he had taken a vow of silence. So I asked him by signs whether God was one or many. He replied in the same manner, indicating that God is known to be one when a person enters into the state of samadhi; but as long as there is any consciousness of I, you, jiva, and the world, God is perceived as many. I pointed to him and told Hriday, ‘In him you see the condition of a true knower of Brahman.’

Trailanga Swami once said that because a man reasons he is conscious of multiplicity, of variety. Attaining samadhi, one gives up the body in twenty-one days. Spiritual consciousness is not possible without the awakening of the

Kundalini.

A person dying in Benares sees the vision of Shiva. Shiva says to him: ‘This is My aspect with form, My embodiment in Maya. I assume this form for the sake of the devotees. Now look, I am merging in the indivisible Satchidananda!’ Uttering these words, Shiva withdraws His form and enables the dying person to see Brahman.

In Benares I saw a young sannyasi who belonged to the sect of Nanak. He used to refer to me as the ‘loving monk’ His sect has a monastery in Benares. I was invited there one day. I found that the mohant was like a house-wife. I asked him, ‘What is the way?’ ‘For the Kaliyuga, he said, ‘the path of devotion as enjoined by Narada.’ He was reading a book. When the reading was over, he recited: ‘Vishnu is in water, Vishnu is on land, Vishnu is on the mountain top; the whole world is pervaded by Vishnu.’ At the end he said, ‘Peace! Peace! Abiding Peace!’ One day he was reading the Gita. He was so strict about his monastic rules that he would npt read a holy book looking at a worldly man. So he turned his face toward me and his back on Mathur, who was also present. It was this holy man who told me of Narada’s path of devotion as suited to the people of the Kaliyuga.

While in Benares I was taken to one of their (Tantrik Sects) mystic circles. Each bhairava had a bhairavi with him. I was asked to drink the consecrated wine, but I said I couldn’t touch wine. They drank it. I thought perhaps they would then practise meditation and japa. But nothing of the sort. They began to dance. I was afraid they might fall into the Ganges; the circle had been made on its bank. It is very honourable for husband and wife to assume the roles of bhairava and bhairavi.

I went to Benares with Mathur Babu. Our boat was passing the Manikarnika Ghat on the Ganges, when suddenly I had a vision of Shiva. I stood near the edge of the boat and went into samadhi. The boatman, fearing that I might fall into the water, cried to Hriday: ‘Catch hold of him! Catch hold of him!’ I saw Shiva standing on that ghat, embodying in Himself all the seriousness of the world. At first I saw Him standing by a distance; then I saw Him approaching me. At last He merged in me. Another time, in an ecstatic mood, I saw that a sannyasi was leading me by the hand. We entered a temple and I had a vision of Annapurna made of gold.

Once I went with Mathur to Raja Babu’s drawing room in Benares. I found that they talked there only of worldly matters—money, real estate, and the like. At this, I burst into tears. I said to the Divine Mother: ‘Mother! Where hast Thou brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.’ In Allahabad I noticed the

same things that I saw elsewhere—the same ponds, the same grass, the same trees, the same tamarind-leaves.

I wanted to visit Shyamakunda and Radhakunda; so Mathur Babu sent me there in a palanquin. We had a long way to go. Food was put in the palanquin. I got out to visit the holy Mount Govardhan. At the very sight of the mount I was overpowered with divine emotion and ran to the top. I lost all consciousness of the world around me. The residents of the place helped me to come down.

On my way to the sacred pools of Shyamakunda and Radhakunda, when I saw the meadows, the trees, the shrubs, the birds, and the deer, I was overcome with ecstasy. My clothes became wet with tears. I said: 'O Krishna! Everything here is as it was in the olden days. You alone are absent. This is the very meadow where You tended the cows.' Seated inside the palanquin I lost all power of speech. I couldn't ask the bearers to stop the palanquin. Hriday followed the palanquin. He had warned the bearers to be careful about me.

I was initiated into Vaishnavism in Vrindavan and took the garb of a Vaishnava monk. I spent three days practising the Vaishnava discipline. At Vrindavan I myself put on the garb of the Vaishnavas and wore it for fifteen days.

I have practised the disciplines of all the paths, each for a few days. Otherwise I should have found no peace of mind.

I loved the atmosphere of Vrindavan. The cowherd boys of Vrindavan used to say to the new-comers*: 'Chant the name of Hari. Untie your belongings.'*

The moment I came to the Dhruva Ghat (at Vrindavan), in a flash I saw Vasudeva crossing the Jamuna with Krishna in his arms. One evening I was taking a stroll on the beach of the river. There were small thatched huts on the beach and big plum-trees. The cows were returning from the pasture, raising dust with their hoofs. Then came some cowherd boys crossing the river with their cows. No sooner did I behold this scene than I cried out, 'O Krishna, where are you?' and became unconscious.

At Shyamakunda and Radhakunda I saw the holy men living in small mud huts. Facing away from the road lest their eyes should fall on men, they were engaged in spiritual discipline. One should visit the 'Twelve Grove.'

I went into samadhi at the sight of the image of Bankuvihari. In that state I wanted to touch it. I did not want to visit Govindji twice. At Mathura I dreamt of Krishna as the cowherd boy. Hriday and Mathur Babu had the same dream.

I forgot everything when I went to Vraja. I thought that I would never return to Dakshineswar. But after a few days I remembered my mother, and I realized that she would suffer and grieve for me. Who would look after her and serve her in her advanced age? When this thought arose in my mind, I could no longer stay

there.

Gangamayi became very fond of me in Vrindavan. She was an old woman who lived all alone in a hut near the Nidhuvan. Referring to my spiritual condition and ecstasy, she said, ‘He is the very embodiment of Radha.’ She addressed me as ‘Dulali.’ When with her, I used to forget my food and drink, my bath, and all thought of going home. On some days Hriday used to bring food from home and feed me. Gangamayi also would serve me with food prepared by her own hands. She used to experience trances. At such times a great crowd would come to see her. One day, in a state of ecstasy, she climbed on Hriday’s shoulders.

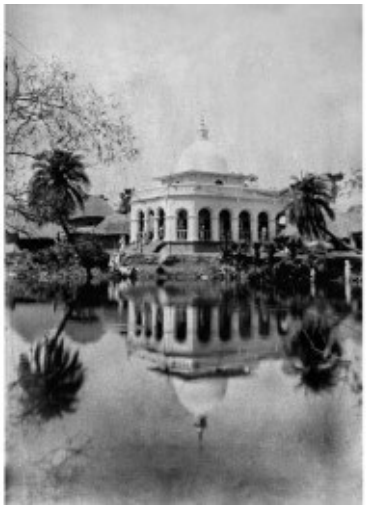
I didn’t want to leave Gangamayi and return to Calcutta. It was arranged that I should live with Gangama. Everything was settled. I was to eat double-boiled rice, and we were to have our beds on either side of the cottage. I resolved not to go back to Calcutta. I said to myself, ‘How long must I eat a kaivarta’s (the proprietors of the Dakshineswar temple who belonged to the fisherman caste, considered low in Hindu society) food?’ ‘No,’ said Hriday to me, ‘let us go to Calcutta,’ ‘You have such a weak stomach. Who will look after you?’ ‘Why,’ said Gangamayi, ‘I shall look after him, I’ll nurse him.’ He pulled me by one hand and Gangamayi pulled me by the other. I felt an intense desire to live at Vrindavan. But just then I remembered my mother. That completely changed everything. She was old. I said to myself: ‘My devotion to God will take to its wings if I have to worry about my mother. I would rather live with her. Then I shall have peace of mind and be able to meditate on God. I found it impossible to stay away from her, and said to Gangamayi, ‘No, I must go.’

This body will not last if I go to Gaya; an eternal samadhi will ensue if I visit Jagannath in Puri.

I went to Navadwip with Mathur. I thought that if Chaitanya were an avatar, there must be some signs of his manifestation, and that I would recognize them. I looked around with a view to seeing his divine manifestation and visited the deities in the houses of Senior Gosain and Junior Gosain, but found nothing. Everywhere I saw wooden images of Chaitanya standing with raised arms. I felt dejected and wondered why I had come. When I was about to board the boat to return, I had a wonderful vision of two beautiful teenaged boys (Chaitanya and Nityananda). I had never seen such beauty before. Their complexions were as bright as molten gold and they had halos round their heads. Smiling, they rushed towards me through air, their arms raised. Immediately I cried out: ‘Here they come! Here they come!.’ No sooner had I uttered these words than they came near and entered here (pointing to his body), and I fell down, unconscious. I would have fallen into the water, but Hriday was nearby and caught hold of me.

Thus, I was shown many such things and became convinced that Chaitanya was a true avatar, a manifestation of divine power.

Once for a few days, I was out on an excursion with Mathur Babu in his house-boat. We took that trip for a change of air. During that trip we visited Navadwip. One day I saw the boat-man cooking their meal and stood and watched them. Mathur said to me, ‘What are you doing there?’ I replied with a smile, ‘The boatmen are cooking, and their food looks very good.’ Mathur felt that I might ask the boatmen to give me a portion of their food; so he said: ‘Come away! Come away!’ But I cannot do such a thing now. I am no longer in that mood. Now the food must be cooked by a Brahmin observing ceremonial purity, and be offered to the Deity**;** then only can I eat it.



Holy Mother’s temple Jayrambati in 1923

Sri Ramakrishna’s house at present in Kamarpukur

Holy Mother’s house at present in Jayrambati

Simhabahini at Jayrambati

Sri Ramakrishna’s temple, Kamarpukur at Present

Holy Mother’s temple, Jayrambati at Present

THE MASTER'S COMMENTARIES

GOD

God—His existence

You see many stars at night in the sky but find them not when the sun rises; can you say that there are no stars in the heaven of day? So, O man, because you behold not God in the days of your ignorance, say not that there is no God.

God Impersonal (Brahman)

Q. What is the nature of Brahman?

A. Brahman is without attributes, unchangeable, immovable, and firm like Mount Meru. His name is Intelligence (Chinmaya). His abode is Intelligence, and He, the Lord, is All Intelligence.

God impersonal is beyond description

Q. Can Brahman be described?

A. It cannot be explained by words. As a man called upon to give an idea of the ocean to a person who has never seen it, can only say, "It is a vast sheet of water, a big expanse of water, it is water—water all round;" so one who has realised Brahman can only say, "Brahman, Brahman is everywhere."

The Vedas, the Tantras, and the Puranas and all the sacred scriptures of the world have become as if defiled (as food thrown out of the mouth becomes polluted), because they have one, manifests Himself differently according to the different likings of His worshippers and each one of these has his own view of God which he values most. To some He is a kind master or a loving father, a sweet ,smiling mother or a devoted friend, and to others a faithful husband or a dutiful and obliging son.

Fire itself has no definite shape but in glowing embers it assumes certain forms. The formless fire is then endowed with forms. Similarly the formless God sometimes invests Himself with definite forms.

So long as the sound of a bell is audible, it exists in the region of form: but when it is no longer heard, it has become formless. Similarly, God is both with form and formless.

God’s many aspects

Sri Ramakrishna accompanied Mathur Babu on his pilgrimage to Benares. While stopping at that city Sri Ramakrishna paid a visit to Trailanga Swami. Mathur Babu asked Trailanga Swami, “How is it that people speak of so many Gods although there is but one God?” The Swami was observing a vow of silence; so he merely raised one of his fingers and threw himself into a sort of trance, hinting thereby that by meditation one comes to know that there is only one God, but by philosophical discussion the sense of unity is displaced by a sense of diversity.

Q. If in all religions of the world there reigns the same God, then why does the same God appear different in different religions?

A. God is one, but many are His aspects. As one master of the house appears in various aspects, being father to one, brother to another, and husband to a third, so one God is described and called in various ways according to the particular aspect in which He appears to His particular worshipper.

God’s powers & attributes unlimited

One day in the course of a conversation about God, Mathur Babu observed, “God too is bound by the laws of nature; He cannot act just as He wishes.” Sri Ramakrishna said, “How can that be so? He acts just as He pleases. He can do anything He likes.” Mathur Babu said, “Can He produce white flowers on this red Hibiscus plant by His mere wish? Sri Ramakrishna replied, “Certainly He can do that. If it be His wish, this red Hibiscus plant shall bear white flowers.” But Mathur did not seem to be fully convinced. As a matter of fact, however, in a few days it was seen that the Hibiscus plant bore two flowers, one red and the other white, on two different offshoots of the same branch. Sri Ramakrishna carried the main branch with the two offshoots to Mathur, who felt highly surprised and exclaimed, “Father! I will never more argue a point with Thee.”

The snake has poison in its fangs, but it is none the worse for it. The poison does not affect it or cause its death. It is poison in relation to other creatures whom it may chance to bite. So also, although the phenomenal universe exists in God, He is beyond and above it. The universe of phenomena exists as such only for us.

The sun is many times bigger than the earth but distance makes it look like a very small disc. So the Lord is infinitely great, but being too far away from Him we fail to comprehend His real greatness.

God is like a hill of sugar. A small ant carries away from it a small grain of sugar, a bigger one takes from it a considerably larger grain. But the hill remains as large as before. So are the devotees of God. They become ecstatic with even a grain of one Divine attribute. No one can contain within him all His attributes.

God's nature

It is the nature of the lamp to give light. With its help some may cook food, some may forge deeds, and some may read the Bhagavata (scriptures). Is it the fault of the light? So, is it the fault of God that some try to attain salvation with the help of His holy name, while others use His name for success in attempted theft?

God is like the divine wish-yielding tree (Kalpataru), which gives whatever one asks of it. So one should be careful to give up all worldly desires when one's mind has been purified by religious exercises. Just hear a story: A certain traveller came to a large plain in the course of his travels. As he had been walking in the sun for a good many hours, he was thoroughly exhausted and was heavily perspiring; so he sat down in the shade of a tree to take a little rest. Presently he began to think what a comfort it would be could he but get a soft bed there to sleep upon. The traveller had no idea that he was sitting under the divine tree. As soon as the above thought rose in his mind he found a nice bed by his side. He felt much astonished, but all the same stretched himself on it. Now he thought to himself, how pleasant it would be were a young damsel to come there and gently stroke his legs. No sooner had the thought arisen in his mind than he found a young damsel sitting near his feet and stroking his legs. The traveller felt supremely happy. Presently he felt hungry and thought within himself, "I have got whatever I have wished for; could I not then get some food?" Instantly he found various kinds of delicious food spread before him. He at once fell to eating and having helped himself to his heart's content, stretched himself again on his bed. He now began to revolve in his mind the events of the day. While thus occupied he thought to himself, "If, a tiger should attack me all of a sudden!" In an instant a large tiger jumped upon him and broke his neck and began to drink his blood. In this way the traveller lost his life. Such is the fate of men in general. If during your meditation you pray for men or money or worldly honours, your desires are no doubt satisfied to some extent, but mind! there is the dread of the tiger hidden behind the gifts you get. Those tigers—disease, bereavements, loss of honour, and wealth, etc.—are a thousand times more terrible than the live tiger.

God in man

Do you know how God dwells in man? He dwells in the same way as ladies of wealthy families do behind a latticed screen. They can see everybody, but no one can see them. God abides in all in an exactly similar way.

As fishes playing in a pond covered over with reeds and scum cannot be seen from outside, so God plays invisible in the heart of man. being screened by Maya from human view.

The watchman can see with a dark lantern (bull's-eye) everyone on whom he throws its rays, but no one can see him so long as he does not turn the light upon himself. So does God see everyone, but no one sees Him until the Lord reveals Himself to him in His mercy.

Q. How does.the Lord dwell in the body?

A. He dwells in the body like the plug of a syringe—that is, in the body, and yet apart from it.

MAYA

Maya as the Cosmic Power of the Lord

Maya is to Brahman what the snake in motion is to the snake at rest. Force in action is Maya, force in potency is Brahman.

As the water of the ocean is now calm and next agitated into waves, so are Brahman and Maya. The ocean in the tranquil state is Brahman, and in the turbulent state,Maya.

The relation of Brahman to Sakti is that of fire to its burning property.

Siva and Sakti (Intelligence and Energy) are both necessary for creation. With dry clay no potter can make a pot; water also is necessary. So Siva alone cannot create without the help of Sakti.

Desirous of seeing Maya I had one day a vision: A small drop slowly expanded and formed itself into a girl; the girl became a woman and gave birth to a child; and as soon as the child was born, she took it up and swallowed it. In this way, many children were born to her and were devoured by her. Then I knew that she was Maya.

The snake itself is not affected by the poison in its fangs; but when it bites, the poison kills the creature bitten. Likewise Maya is in the Lord but does not affect Him, while the same Maya deludes the whole world.

Maya as the Deluding Power (Avidya)

A certain Sadhu lived for some time in a room in the temple of Dakshineswar. He did not speak to anybody and spent his whole time in meditation on God. One day, all of a sudden, a cloud darkened the sky, and shortly afterwards, a light wind blew away the cloud. The holy man now came out of his room and began to laugh and dance. Upon this the Master asked him, ‘How is it that you, who spend your days so quietly in your room, are dancing in joy and feeling so jovial today?’ The holy man replied, ‘Such is Maya that envelops this life! No trace of it was there before; but suddenly it appears, in the serene sky of Brahman, creating the whole universe, and is dispersed by the breath of Brahman.’

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana went to the forest as exiles. Rama walked in front, Sita in the middle, Lakshmana behind her. Lakshmana was very anxious to have always a full view of Rama; but as Sita was in the middle, he could not have it. Then he prayed to Sita to move aside a little; and as soon as she did so, Lakshmana’s wish was fulfilled, and he saw Rama. Such is the arrangement of Brahman, Maya and Jiva in this world. So long as the illusion of Maya does not move aside, the creature cannot see the Creator—man cannot see God.

A holy man used to look and smile at the chandelier prism day and night. The reason for his doing so was that he saw various colours through the prism— red, yellow, blue etc. Knowing these colours to be false, he realised with a smile that the world also was equally false.

Hari, wearing the mask of a lion’s head, looks indeed very terrible. He goes where his little sister is playing, and roars hideously. She is shocked and terrified, and shrieks out trying to escape from the frightful creature. But when Hari puts off the mask, the frightened girl at once recognises her loving brother and runs up to him, exclaiming, ‘Oh, it is my dear brother after all!’ Such is the case with all men. They are deluded and frightened and made to do all sorts of things by the inscrutable power of Maya or nescience, behind which Brahman hides Himself. But when the veil of Maya is removed from the face of Brahman, one does not see in Him a terrible and uncompromising Master, but one’s own most beloved inner Self.

If God is omnipresent, why do we not see Him? Observing from the bank of a pool thickly covered with scum and weeds, you will not see the water in it. If you desire to see the water, remove the scum from the surface of the pond. With eyes covered with the film of Maya, you complain that you cannot see God. If you wish to see Him, remove the film of Maya from your eyes.

As the cloud covers the sun, so Maya hides the Deity. When the cloud moves away, the sun is seen again, when Maya is removed, God becomes manifest.

The mythical swan can separate milk from the water with which it is diluted, and drink only the milk, leaving the water behind. Other birds cannot do this.

God is intimately mixed up with Maya. Ordinary men cannot see Him apart from Maya. Only the Paramahansa can reject Maya, and reach God in His purity.

If you can find out the nature of Maya, the universal illusion, it will leave you just as a thief runs away when detected.

MAYA AS AHAMKARA OR EGOTISM

(Ahamkara and Aham—These two words have been variously translated here, according to context, as egotism, the sense of I, the I, the ego, the 'I-ness', and so on. None of these is perhaps an exact equivalent. Indian philosophy and system of spiritual discipline understand by it the basic principle of individuation giving rise to the sense of I, the concomitant feeling of separation from God and from other individuals, and all other physical and psychic developments following from it. The aim of spiritual life is to root out this prime source of all worldliness, and realise the unity of all existence.)

Evils of Egotism

The sun can give heat and light to the whole world, but he cannot do so when the clouds shut out his rays. Similarly as long as egotism veils the heart, God cannot shine upon it.

Egotism is like a cloud which keeps God hidden from our sight. If it vanishes by the mercy of the Guru, God is perceived in all His glory. For instance, you see in the picture that Sri Ramachandra, who is God, is only two or three steps ahead of Lakshmana (the Jiva), but Sita (Maya), coming in between the two, prevents Lakshmana from having a view of Rama.

Q. Sir, why are we in bondage like this? Why do we not see God?

A. Man's ego itself is Maya. It is the veil that shuts out the Light. Verily, with the death of the T all troubles cease. If by the grace of the Lord a man once gains the knowledge that he is not the doer, then he assuredly becomes a Jivanmukta, one freed in this very life, and transcends all fear.

If I hold this cloth before me, you cannot see me any more, though I am still as near you as ever. So also though God is nearer to you than anything else, because of the screen of egotism you cannot see Him.

As long as there is egotism, neither Self-knowledge (Jnana) nor liberation (Mukti) is possible; and there is no cessation of birth and death.

Rice, pulse, potatoes and other things put in cold water in an earthen vessel can be touched with the hand until they are heated on a fire. The same statement applies to the Jiva. This body is the egotism. earthen vessel; wealth and learning,

caste and lineage, power and position are like rice, pulse and potatoes. Egotism is the heat. The Jiva is made hot (haughty) by egotism.

Rain-water never stands on high ground, but runs down to the lowest level. So also the mercy of God remains in the hearts of the lowly, but drains off from those of the vain and the proud.

Egotism is so injurious to man that as long as it is not eradicated there is no salvation for him. Look at the young calf and the troubles that come upon it through. As soon as it is born, it cries, 'Hamba'—'I am,' 'I am' The result of its egotism is that when it grows up, if it is an ox, it is yoked to the plough, to drag carts full of heavy load; if a cow, it is kept tied to its post and is sometimes even killed and eaten. But still, in spite of all this punishment, the animal does not lose its egotism; for drums that are made ,of its hide produce the same sound of 'Ham', I. The creature does not learn humility until the cotton-carder makes bowstrings out of its entrails; for it is then that the animal's intestines sing out 'Tuhu'— 'Thou art'. The I must go and give place to the 'Thou'; and this is not achieved until man becomes spiritually awakened.

Freedom will come when your 'I-hood' (egotism) vanishes and you yourself are merged in the Divinity.

When does a man attain salvation? Only when his egotism dies.

Q. When shall I be free?

A. When that 'I' vanishes from you, 'I' and 'mine'— this is ignorance; 'Thou' and 'Thine'—that is true knowledge. The true devotee always says, 'O Lord, Thou art the doer (Karta). Thou doest everything. I am a mere instrument in Thy hands. I do whatever Thou makest me do. All this is Thy glory. This home and this family are Thine, not mine; I have only the right to serve as Thou ordainest!

The Difficulty of Conquering Egotism

The vanities of all others may gradually die out but the vanity of a saint regarding his sainthood is hard indeed to wear away.

The cup in which garlic juice is kept retains the odour, though washed several times. Egotism is such an obstinate aspect of ignorance that it never disappears completely, however hard you may try to get rid of it.

The dyspeptic knows only too well that sour things are injurious to him, but such is the force of association that the sight of them is enough to make his mouth water. So, even if one tries hard to suppress the idea of 'I-ness' and 'mine-ness' yet when one begins to act, the 'unripe' ego asserts itself.

There are few who can attain Samadhi and get rid of the Aham—the feeling of I within. Generally it does not go. You may reason and discriminate without end,

yet this I comes back again and again. Today you may cut down the Peepul tree, but tomorrow you will see it sprouting again.

Those who seek name and fame are under a delusion. They forget that everything is ordained by the Great Dispenser of all things and that all is due to the Lord and the Lord alone. The wise man says always, It is Thou, O Lord, It is Thou'; but the ignorant and the deluded say, 'It is I, it is I'

The ego that asserts 'I am the servant of God' is characteristic of the true devotee. It is the ego of Vidya (Knowledge), and is called the 'ripe' ego.

What is the 'mischievous I'? The I, which says, 'What! Don't they know me? I have so much money! Who is so wealthy as I am? Who dares to surpass me?'

The I, which makes a man worldly and attached to lust and wealth is mischievous. The individual soul and the Universal Being are separated because this I, comes in between them. If a stick is placed on the surface of water, the water will appear to be divided into two sections. The stick is the Aham—the I. Take that away, and the water becomes again undivided.

If one ponders over this word I, trying to track it down, one sees that it is only a word which denotes egotism. But it is extremely difficult to shake it off. So one must say, 'You wicked "I", if you will not go by any means, remain as the servant of God.' The ego that feels itself to be the servant of God is called the 'ripe I'.

RELIGIOUS TEACHERS—FALSE AND TRUE

Pitfalls of Teachership

Do you, O preacher, carry the badge of authority? the humblest servant of the king, authorised by him, is heard with awe and respect, and can quell a riot by showing his badge; so must you, O preacher, first obtain your commission and inspiration from God Himself. So long as you do not have this badge of Divine inspiration, you may preach all your life, but it will be a mere waste of breath.

None has the patience or desire to dive deep into Divine love. None cares for discrimination and dispassion for worldly things (Viveka and Vairagya), or for devotional practices (Sadhanas). On the other hand, all men rush to lecture and to teach with only a bit of book-learning.

Strange indeed! To teach others is the most difficult of tasks. He alone can teach, who gets a commission from God after having realised Him.

What do you think of the man who is a good orator and preacher, but whose spiritual powers are undeveloped? He is like the person who squanders another's property entrusted to him. He can easily advise others, for it costs him nothing

since the ideas he expresses are not his own but borrowed.

A well-known speaker was lecturing once in a Harisabha (religious association). In the course of his speech he said, ‘The Lord is totally devoid of Rasa (sweetness); we must make Him sweet by lending to Him the sweetness of our own nature.’ By Rasa he meant love and other divine attributes. When I heard this, I was reminded of the boy who said that his mother’s brother had many horses, and sought to convince his hearers by explaining that they occupied a whole cowshed. Of course, the intelligent could at once see that cowsheds are not meant for horses, that the youngster was telling a lie, and that he had no experience or knowledge of horses:

To say that God is devoid of Rasa was an absurdity, which proved that the speaker was totally ignorant of what he was saying. He had never realised the Supreme Being, Who is the very fountain of eternal love, wisdom and joy.

What is your opinion about the method employed by present-day religious preachers? It is like inviting a hundred persons to a dinner with food enough only for one. It is only pretending to be a great religious teacher with a small stock of spiritual experience.

First install God in the temple of your heart; first realise Him. Speeches, lectures and the rest may be taken up after you have seen God, not before. People talk glibly of God and Brahman, while they are attached to the things of the world. What does all this amount to? Mere blowing of the conch (Sankha) for Divine Service without an Image to worship within the temple.

One day as I was going through the Panchavati, I heard the frightful croaking of a frog. I guessed it must have been caught by a snake. When after a long time I was returning that way, I again heard the same noise. Peeping through the bushes, I saw a water snake with a frog in its mouth. It could neither swallow it, nor let it go, and there was no end to the agony of the frog. Then I thought, ‘Well, had it been the victim of a cobra, it would have been silenced for ever after three croaks at the most (and then there would have been no more suffering for either the frog or the snake). But here the snake’s suffering is almost equal to the frog’s.’ So if an unenlightened man takes upon himself in his foolhardiness the responsibility of saving another, there is no end to the misery of both. Neither does the ego of the disciple vanish, nor are his worldly ties cut asunder. If the disciple comes under the influence of an unworthy teacher, he never gets liberation. But under a competent teacher the egotism of the Jiva perishes with three croaks.

There was a professional preacher who could rouse strong devotional feelings in the hearts of his hearers whenever he delivered religious discourses; but personally he was not a man of character. Pained at the kind of life he led, I

asked him one day how it was that he moved so many hearts to devotion, while he himself lived such an unworthy life. The man bowed and said, ‘Yes, Sir, the broom, though a contemptible thing, removes the dust and dirt on the floor and the street!’ Of course I could not answer him.

Who is a True Teacher?

He alone is the true teacher who is illumined by the light of true Knowledge.

As many people have merely heard of ice but not seen it, so many religious preachers have only read in books about the attributes of God, but not realised them for themselves. And as many others have seen ice but not tasted it, so many religious teachers have obtained only a glimpse of Divine glory but have not understood its real essence. Only he who has tasted the ice can say what it is like. Similarly, he alone can describe the attributes of God, who has associated with Him in His different aspects in the relationship of a servant, a friend and a lover, and has realised his oneness with Him in complete absorption in Him.

There are two classes of perfect men in the world those who, on attaining Truth, become silent and enjoy it all by themselves without any thought of others; and those who attain Truth, but finding no pleasure in keeping it to themselves, cry out in a trumpet voice to all—’Come ye, and enjoy the Truth with us.’

Bees come of themselves to the full-blown flower when the breeze wafts its fragrance all around. Ants come of themselves to the spot where sweets are placed. No one need invite the bee or the ant. So when a man becomes pure and perfect, the sweet influence of his character spreads everywhere, and all who seek the Truth are naturally drawn towards him. He need not go in search of an audience to listen to him.

Ants gather of themselves where the sweetmeats have fallen. Try to become sugar candy, *i.e.*, have within yourselves the sweetness of an enlightened spiritual consciousness, and the ants (devotees) will come to you of themselves. If you preach without commission from God, your preaching will be powerless, and none will listen to it. One must attain God by devotion or by any other means, and then, if one receives His word, one may teach and preach anywhere and everywhere. For, only thus can one get power and strength from Him; and only then can one rightly discharge the responsible duties of a preacher.

When fire burns, the moths come, one knows not whence, and fall into it. The fire never goes about inviting the moth. Such is the preaching of the perfect. They do not go about inviting others, but hundreds and thousands, of their own accord, come to them—one knows not whence—seeking instruction from them.

Rain-water falling upon the roof of a house flows down to the ground through

spouts shaped grotesquely like a tiger’s head. One gets the impression! that the water comes from the tiger’s mouth, but in reality it descends from the sky. In the same way the holy! teachings that come from the mouths of godly men seem to be uttered by those men themselves, while in reality they proceed from God.

Ideals of the Sanyasin

The first birth of man is from his father; Upanayana marks his second birth, and Sannyasa the third.

The mind is much wasted while one is engaged in worldly pursuits. And that loss can be made good, only if one takes to the life of renunciation (Sannyasa).

Yogins and Sannyasins are like snakes. The snake does not dig out a hole for itself, but lives in the hole made by the mouse. When one hole becomes uninhabitable, it enters into another hole. Just so Yogins and Sannyasins make no house for themselves. They pass their days in other men’s houses—today in one house, tomorrow in another.

Sadhus never settle down in a place where there are no ‘jungles’ nearby and where ‘food and drink’ is hard to get. ‘Jungles’ means solitary spots for answering the calls of nature; and ‘food and drink’ means alms.

As Sadhus live on alms, they select only those places for their temporary residence where alms can be easily procured. When they get tired in the course of their journey they may halt at a place for a day or two, in spite of the difficulty of procuring alms. But they never stay anywhere if there is scarcity of water and of solitary spots for answering the calls of nature. Good Sadhus never attend to these matters of physical cleanliness in places where they may be observed by others. They finish these things in solitude, far away from the haunts of men.

If a white cloth is stained even with a small spot, the stain appears very ugly indeed. So is the smallest fault of a holy man.

When one has taken up the garb of a Sannyasin, one has to conduct oneself precisely like a true Sadhu. Don’t you see in the drama how the person playing the part of a king always acts like a king and he who is in the role of the minister always plays the minister? Once a village clown put on the garb of a Sannyasin and appeared before the Zamindar of the place. The Zamindar wanted to present him with a purse, but he refused to accept it and went away. After a while he came back, having washed himself and changed his dress, and asked for the money that the Zamindar wanted to give. When he dressed like a Sadhu, he could not even touch the money, but now he was ready to feel gratified even with a four-anna bit.

A person went to a holy man to get some medicine for his sick child, carrying

the little patient in his arms. The holy man asked him to come next day. Next day, when the man went, the Sadhu said, ‘Give no sweets to the child, and the child will soon be cured.’ The man replied, ‘Sir, you could have told me this yesterday itself.’ The Sadhu said, ‘Yes, I could have, but yesterday I had a quantity of sugar lying before me, and seeing that, your child would have thought that the Sadhu who advised others not to take sugar but ate it himself was a hypocrite.’

The man who becomes an ascetic owing to some misunderstanding with his father, or mother, or wife called an ‘ascetic-by-disgust’. His asceticism is momentary; he gives up the ascetic way of life as soon as he gets a good lucrative job in a wealthy family.

A disciple: How can we recognise a truly pious man (Sadhu)?

The Master: He is truly pious whose heart and soul are wholly dedicated to God. Truly pious is he who has renounced ‘woman and gold’. The truly pious man never views women in the ordinary worldly light. He always remains at a distance from them, and if they happen to come near, he looks on them as his mother and shows respect to them. He thinks constantly of God, and serves all creatures knowing that He resides in all. These are the general traits of the truly pious.

Trust not a Sannyasin who practises medicine, uses spells and incantations, receives money, and displays his piety with the sign-boards of elaborate external marks.

Forgiveness is the true nature of the ascetic.

SOME AIDS TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

Caste and External Observances

Honour both spirit and form, the sentiment within as well as the symbol without.

In a grain of paddy the germ is commonly considered to be the only thing necessary for germination and growth, while the husk is regarded as of no importance; but if the husked grain is sown, it will not sprout and grow up into a plant and yield rice. To get a crop one must needs to sow the grain with its husk intact. If, however; one wants to get the pure grain itself for eating purposes, one must remove the husk from the seed. So rites and ceremonies are necessary for the growth and perpetuation of a religion. They are the receptacles that contain the germinating seeds of truth; and consequently every man must perform them till he reaches the central truth therein.

The oyster that contains the precious pearl is in itself of very little value, but it

is essential for the growth of the pearl. The shell itself may prove to be of no use to the man who has secured the pearl. So ceremonies and rites may not be necessary for him who has attained the highest truth, namely, God.

Rituals are to be observed. But when one advances in spirituality, it is not necessary to observe them for long. Then the mind gets concentrated on God, resulting in communion with Him.

When a wound is perfectly healed, the scab falls off of itself; but if the scab be taken off earlier, it bleeds. In the same way, with the advent of Divine illumination all distinctions of caste vanish; but it is wrong for the ignorant to override such distinctions, lest they should lead to undesirable consequences.

A fruit that has ripened on the tree and fallen down of itself, tastes very sweet, but the one that has been picked and ripened artificially is not so sweet, and soon shrivels up. In like manner, the rules of caste fall away of themselves from him who has attained perfection and has realised the unity of all things; but those who have had no such exalted experience cannot escape the consciousness of superiority and inferiority in others, and have to observe caste distinctions. If in this state of ignorance a man feigns perfection by overriding all caste distinctions and by living a free life, he is surely like the green fruit artificially ripened.

Is it proper for one who has attained Divine wisdom to keep the Brahminical thread? When the knowledge of the Self is gained, all fetters drop off of themselves. Then there is no distinction between Brahmana and Sudra, between high caste and low caste. Thus the sacred thread, a sign of caste, falls off of itself. But so long as a man is conscious of any distinction and difference, he should not forcibly throw it away.

While a storm is blowing, we cannot distinguish between an Asvattha (fig tree) and a Vata (banyan tree). So when the storm of supreme Knowledge blows, there can be no distinction of caste.

Worship of images

While raising a building, the scaffolding is indispensable; but when the work is completed, no one feels the necessity of it. So also image-worship is necessary in the beginning but not afterwards.

As a man begins to learn writing by drawing big scrawls before he tries to write a smaller hand, so a person must acquire the power of concentrating his thoughts by fixing the mind first upon forms, and then, after succeeding therein, by fixing it upon the formless.

A marksman learns to shoot by first having big objects to shoot at; and as he acquires more and more facility in shooting, he aims more and more easily at the

smaller marks on the target. So when the mind has been trained to focus on images having form, it is easy for it to do so on things having no form.

As a toy fruit or a toy elephant reminds one of the real fruit and the living animal, so do the images that are worshipped remind one of God who is formless and eternal.

The Master once said to a disciple of his: You were talking of images made of clay. There arises a necessity for them too. These various forms used for worship have been provided to suit the needs of different men at different stages of spiritual evolution.

The mother so arranges the food for her children that each one gets what agrees with him. If she has five children and she gets a big fish to cook, she makes different dishes out of it, and gives each one what suits him exactly. One is given rich Polao with fish; another, of weak digestion, only a little soup; and so on, according to the digestive power of each. (The same is the case with the various symbols and disciplines prescribed for spiritual aspirants.)

A disciple: One may believe that God is ‘with form’. But surely He is not the earthen image that is worshipped.

The Master: Why call it an earthen image? The Divine image is made of Spirit.

The Master once said to Keshab Chandra Sen, who was a great iconoclast in his days: ‘Why do these images rouse the idea of mud and clay, stone and straw, in your mind? Why can you not realize the presence of the eternal, blissful, all-conscious Mother even in these forms?’

If a worshipper is convinced that the images of the Deity in the shapes of various Gods and Goddesses are verily divine, he reaches God through their worship. But if he holds them to be nothing better than mud and straw and clay, to him the worship of such images does no good.

If there is anything wrong in image-worship, does He not know that all worship is meant for Him? He will surely be pleased to accept the worship, knowing that it is meant for Him alone. Love God; that is the duty nearest to you.

When one sees God, one realises that everything, images and all, is a manifestation of the Spirit. To him the image is not made of clay but of Spirit.

Value of Pilgrimages

The milk of the cow in reality pervades the whole body of the animal through its blood, but you cannot milk it by squeezing’the ears or the horns; you can get the milk only from the teats. Similarly, God pervades the universe everywhere,

but you cannot see Him everywhere. He manifests Himself more readily in sacred temples, which are full of the spirit of devotion diffused by the lives and spiritual practices of the devotees of former times.

Know that there must be the manifestation of God in places where countless people have for long practised austerity, Japa, meditation, prayer and worship with a view to realising Him. Through their devotion, spiritual ideas are present in these places in a solidified form, as it were. Hence there a man easily feels the awakening of spirituality and realises Him. From time immemorial, numberless sadhus, devotees and men of realisation have come to these holy places to have a vision of God, and have prayed to Him in an outpouring of their hearts, setting aside all worldly desires. Therefore, God though equally present everywhere, manifests Himself specially in these places. Water can be had anywhere by digging into the earth. When, however, there is a well or a tank or a lake, one has not to dig for water, but can get it whenever one likes to have it.

As cows, after eating their fill, lie down quietly at a place and chew the cud, so after visiting a sacred spot or a place of pilgrimage, you must take hold of the holy thoughts that arose in the mind while there, sit down in a solitary corner and think of them till you are immersed in them. You must not devote yourself to the pursuit of the senses, driving away the higher ideas from your mind immediately after you leave holy places.

Travel in all the four quarters of the earth, yet you will find nothing (no true religion) anywhere. Whatever there is, is only here *(i.e.* in one's own heart).

WAYS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Some Obstacles to Spiritual Life

God comes not where reign timidity, hatred and fear.

The heavier scale of a balance goes down while the lighter rises up. Similarly, he who is weighed down by the many cares and anxieties of the world sinks down into it, while he who has fewer rises up towards the feet of the Lord.

A man who spends his time in discussing the good and bad qualities of others simply wastes his own time. For it is time spent neither in thinking about one's own self nor about the Supreme Self, but in fruitless thinking of others' selves.

In what condition of mind is the vision of God obtained? When the mind is perfectly tranquil. When the sea of one's mind is agitated by the wind of desires, it cannot reflect God, and God-vision is impossible then.

Though a person's stomach may be full and he be suffering from dyspepsia in addition, his tongue will water naturally at the sight of sweet delicacies and savoury sauces. Similarly a man may not have the slightest covetousness in him; yet the sight of wealth and other objects of temptation will unsettle his mind,

howsoever holy he may be.

Be not like the frog in the well. The frog in the well knows nothing bigger and grander than its well. So are all bigots. They do not see anything better than their own creed.

The great Sankaracharya had a foolish disciple who used to imitate his Master in all matters. Sankara uttered ‘Sivoham’ (I am Siva); the disciple also repeated ‘Sivoham’. To correct his disciple’s folly, Sankara one day, while passing by a smithy, took a potful of molten iron and asked the disciple also to do the same. Of course, the disciple could not imitate this act of his Master, and thence forward he left off saying ‘Sivoham’. Base imitation is always bad, but an attempt to correct one’s own self by the noble examples of the great ones is always good.

Attitude Towards Suffering

Disease is the tax which the soul pays for the use of the body, as the tenant pays house-rent for the use of the house.

Iron must be heated again and again and hammered a hundred times before it becomes good steel. Then only it becomes fit to be made into a sharp sword, and can be bent in any way you like. So man must be heated several times in the furnace of tribulations and hammered with the persecutions of the world before he becomes pure and humble, and fit to enter the presence of God.

The Master once said to Keshab Chandra Sen while the latter was ill, ‘You are suffering; but your illness has a deep meaning. In this body you have gone through various stages of spiritual development; the body is now suffering from the reaction. When the spiritual waves arise, the consciousness of the body vanishes, but it tells upon the body in the end. When a big steamer plies on the Ganges, the waves dash against the shore for sometime after the steamer has passed. The larger the boat, the bigger the waves; and sometimes they even break down the banks. If an elephant enters a small hut, the hut shakes and falls down. So also the experience of spiritual ecstasy shakes and sometimes shatters the body of the devotee. Do you know the consequence of this? If a house catches fire, many things are burnt. Similarly, the fire of Divine wisdom burns all passions, anger and other evils, and in the end destroys the consciousness of “I, me and mine”. The body then suffers a severe shock and is shattered. You may think that everything is finished, but as long as there is the least vestige of the ego, He will not make you free. If you are admitted as a patient in a hospital you will not be discharged unless you are perfectly cured.’

The Master said to Keshab while the latter was ill: ‘The gardener sometimes

exposes the roots of rose bushes, so that the dew may fall upon them. Sometimes he trims off some of the roots, so that the flowers may become larger. Perhaps the Lord is preparing you to do greater works.'

Expressing his own attitude towards illness, the Master said: 'Let the disease run its course and let the body suffer, but, O mind, be thou ever in bliss.'

The power and glory of knowledge and faith never fail a true devotee, whatever be the joy and suffering his body undergoes. His knowledge and faith never get dim.

See how severe were the tribulations that visited the Pandavas, yet not for a moment did the light of knowledge desert them!

Humility and Self-Respect

It is a great degradation to be conceited. Look at the crow—how wise it thinks itself to be! It never falls into a snare. It flies off at the slightest approach of danger, and steals food with the greatest dexterity. But the poor creature cannot help eating filth. This is the result of being over wise or having the wisdom of a pettifogger.

To become great one must be humble. The nest of the skylark is on the earth below, but it soars high into the sky. High ground is not fit for cultivation; low ground is necessary, so that water may stand on it.

The tree laden with fruits always bends low. If you wish to be great, be lowly and meek.

Our duty is to fall down and adore where others only bow.

One should not entertain egotistical feeling, such as the conceit of the preacher, 'I am lecturing, hear me, all of you!' Egotism exists in ignorance, not in Knowledge. He attains the Truth who is devoid of conceit. The rain water stands in low places, but runs down from high places.

In a balance, the scale that is heavy goes down, but the lighter one rises up. So the man of merit and ability is always humble and meek, while the fool is puffed up with vain conceit.

A true man (Manush) is only he who is a Manush—one endowed with a sense of self-respect. Others are men only in name.

No pride is pride that expresses the glory of the soul. No humility is humility that humiliates the self.

Simplicity

Till one becomes simple like a child, one cannot get divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that you have acquired and become as ignorant

of it as a child; then you will get the knowledge of the Truth.

Simple-mindedness takes one easily to God. If a person is simple, spiritual instructions easily fructify in him, as seeds germinate easily and grow to bear fruit soon when sown in tilled soil free from stones.

The Master usecd to say ‘People become generous and simple-minded only in consequence of much penance. God can never be attained except with a simple mind. It is to the simple-minded that He reveals His own nature.’ But to safeguard people from developing into simpletons in the name of simplicity and truthfulness, the Master would also sound a note of warning: ‘You are to be a devotee but not a simpleton on that account.’ Or again, ‘Always you must discriminate in your mind between the true and the false, the eternal and transient; and then leaving aside all that is transient, you should fix your mind upon that alone which is eternal.’

Conquest of Desires

He is a true man who is dead even in this life— that is, whose passions and propensities have been curbed to extinction as in a dead body.

So long as the heavenly expanse of the heart is troubled and disturbed by the gusts of desire, there is little chance of our beholding therein the brightness of God. The beatific vision dawns only in the heart that is calm and rapt in Divine communion.

God cannot be seen so long as there is the slightest taint of desire. Therefore have your minor desires satisfied, and renounce the major ones through right reasoning and discrimination.

As one who is standing by the brink of a deep well is always careful lest he should fall into it, even so should one living in the world be always on his guard against its temptations. He who has once fallen into the well of the world, so full of temptations, can hardly come out of it uninjured and stainless.

On being asked when the enemies of man, such as lust, anger etc., will be vanquished, the Master replied: ‘So long as these passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they behave like enemies. But when they are directed towards God, they become the best friends of man, for then they lead him unto God. The lust for the things of the world must be changed into the hankering for God, the anger that man feels in relation to his fellow man should be turned towards God for not revealing Himself to him. One should deal with all the passions in the same manner. These passions cannot be eradicated but can be educated.’

When an elephant is let loose, it goes about uprooting trees and shrubs; but as soon as the driver applies the hook on its head it becomes quiet. So the mind,

when unrestrained, wantons in the luxurance of idle thoughts, but becomes at once calm when pulled up with the goad of discrimination.

When butter-is produced by churning curds, it should not be kept in the same vessel with the buttermilk, for then it will lose something of its sweetness and hardness. It should be kept in pure water and in a different vessel. Similarly after attaining partial perfection in the world, if one still continues to mix with the worldly and remains in the midst of the temptations of the world, one is likely to become tainted, but one can remain pure by living out of the world.

Attitude Towards Women

All women are parts of the Divine Mother, and therefore they should be looked upon as mothers by all.

Women, whether naturally good or not, whether chaste or unchaste, should always be looked upon as images of the blissful Divine Mother.

Q. How should we look upon the fair sex?

A. He who has known the Real, who is blessed with the vision of God, does not regard them with any fear. He sees them as they really are—parts of the Divine Mother of the universe. So he not only pays all honour and respect to women, but actually worships them as a son does his mother.

Q. How can we conquer lust?

A. Look upon all women as your own mother. Never look a woman in the face, but always look at her feet. All evil thoughts will then flyaway.

The woman who observes continence even while living with her husband is veritably the Divine Mother Herself.

Prayer and Devotion

Q. Should we pray aloud to God?

A. Pray to Him in any way you like. He is always sure to hear you. He can hear even the footfall of an ant.

Q, Is there really any efficacy in prayers?

A. Yes. When mind and speech unite in earnestly asking for a thing, that prayer is answered. Of no avail are the prayers of that man who says with his mouth, ‘These are all Thine, O Lord!’ and at the same time thinks in his heart that all of them are his.

Be not a traitor to your thoughts. Be sincere; act according to your thoughts;

and you shall surely succeed.

Pray with a sincere and simple heart, and your prayers will be heard.

That which you think, you should speak. Let there be harmony between your thought and word. Otherwise, if you merely say that God is your all in all, while in your mind you have made the world your all in all, you cannot derive any benefit.

To approach a mighty monarch a man must ingratiate himself with the officials who keep the gate and guard the throne. So to reach the Almighty Lord and obtain His grace, one must practise much devotion, serve many devotees, and keep for long the company of the wise.

Do not let worldly thoughts and anxieties disturb your mind. Do everything that is necessary in the proper time, and let your mind be always fixed on God.

Nature of True Yearning

Let your heart pant for Him as a miser longs for gold.

As the drowning man pants hard to breathe so must one's heart yearn for the Lord, before one can find Him.

Do you know what kind of Love is required for gaining the Lord? Just as a dog with a bruised head runs restlessly, so must one become distressed for His sake.

O heart, call on your almighty Mother sincerely and you will see how She quickly comes running to you. When one calls on God with heart and soul, He cannot remain unmoved.

Do you know how intense our love of God should be? The love that a devoted wife possesses for her beloved husband, the attachment that a miser feels for his hoarded wealth, and the clinging desire that the worldly-minded people foster for the things of the world— when the intensity of your heart's longing for the Lord is equal to the sum of these three, then you will attain Him.

Jesus Christ was one day walking along the seashore when a devotee approached him and asked him, 'Lord, how can one attain God?' Jesus directly walked into the sea with the enquirer and immersed him in the water. After a short time he released him, and raising him by the arm, asked him, 'How did you feel?' The devotee replied, 'I felt as though my last moment had come—the condition was desperate.' Upon this Jesus said, 'You shall see the Father when your heart pants for Him as it has panted for a breath of air just now.'

'I must attain God in this very life; yes, in three days I must find Him; nay, with a single utterance of His name I will draw Him to me'—with such violent Love the devotee can attract the Lord and realise Him quickly But devotees who

are lukewarm in their Love take ages to find Him if indeed they find Him at all.

Why this attitude of an idler, that if realisation is not possible in this birth, it will come in the next? There should not be such sluggishness in devotion. The goal can never be reached unless a man makes his mind strong, and firmly resolves that he must realise God in this very birth, nay, this very moment. In the countryside, when cultivators go to purchase bullocks, they first touch the tails of the animals. Some of the bullocks do not make any response to this. Rather, they relax all their limbs and lie down on the ground. At once the cultivators understand them to be worthless. There are some others that jump about and behave violently the moment their tails are touched; and the peasants immediately know that these will be very useful to them. Their choice is then made from among this active type. Slothfulness is not at all desirable. Gather strength, firm faith, and say that you must realise God this very moment. Then only can you succeed.

Dakshineswar Temple, Circa 1875

Panchavati, Dakshineswar

Rani Rasmani

Kuthi Badi, Dakshineswar

Early picture of Bhabhatarini and Radha Gobinda Temple and Naatmandir, Dakshineswar

Thakur’s Room, Dakshineswar

Dakshineswar Nahabat and Western verandah of Thakur’s Room through which it is said that Narendranath(Sw.Vivekananda) entered for the first time to see Sri Ramakrishna

Nahabat, Dakshineswar

Dakshineswar Temple today

Bhabatarini- the presiding deity at Dakshineswar

Radha Govinda idols at Dakshineswar (Sri Ramakrishina had personally repaired the leg of this idol of Lord Krishna When it broke due to mishandling)

Dakshineswar Nahabat

We Lived With RAMAKRISHNA

SRI SARADA DEVI

(From: In the Company of Holy Mother, by Her Direct Disciples (Advaita Ashrama Calcutta), 1980; Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother, by Swami Tapasyananda & Swami Nikhilananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math Madras), 1958

Sri Sarada Devi (1853-1920), also called Holy Mother, was the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna. She was married to him at an early age, and when she was eighteen years old she came to the temple garden of Dakshineswar to live near him and serve him. Because of her long and close association with the Master, her reminiscences are especially valuable. After his passing away she continued the spiritual ministry which he began.

The Source

The Master used to say that his body had come from Gaya. When his mother passed away he asked me to offer pindam (funeral cakes) at Gaya. I replied that I was not entitled to perform those rites when the son himself was alive. The Master replied: “No, no, you are entitled to do it. Under no circumstances can I go to Gaya. If I go, do you think it will be possible for me to return?” So I did not want him to go there. And later on I performed the rites at Gaya.

The tradition has it that Sri Ramakrishna’s birth was preceded by a vision his father had at Gaya of Vishnu, who announced that he would be born as his son. Hence, the spiritual association Sri Ramakrishna had with Gaya was likely to overwhelm him if he went there. Gaya is also associated with Buddha and Chaitanya as the turning point in their lives.

The Master, a Perfectionist

When the Master came to Kamarpukur with indigestion I was only a child-wife. He would get up while it was still rather dark and say to me, “Prepare such-and-such dishes for me tomorrow,” and we used to cook them for him. One day we ran out of a particular kind of spice and Lakshmi’s mother (Sri Ramakrishna’s sister-in-law) said: “Well then, carry on without it. Since we haven’t got it, what else can we do?” The Master overheard this conversation

and said: “What do you mean? You are out of that spice, why do you not send somebody to buy a pice worth? One should not omit things that are necessary. Don’t you know that it is for this particular flavouring in your curries that I left the delicious dishes and the thickened milk of Dakshineswar and came here? And now you want to leave out the flavouring!” Lakshmi’s mother felt ashamed and immediately sent for the spices.

Cooking for the Master

One day the Master and Hriday (Ramakrishna’s nephew) were eating together. Lakshmi’s mother and I would cook at Kamarpukur. She was an excellent cook. The Master tasted something she had prepared and remarked, “Hridu, the person who cooked this is a specialist.” Then he ate something that I had cooked and said, “And this one is a quack.” At this Hriday replied: “True, but the quack is at hand and you have only to call her, whereas the specialist is very expensive and not always available. The quack is at your beck and call at all times.” The Master said: “Quite right. She is always there.”

One day at Dakshineswar the Master asked me to cook something nice for Naren. I prepared moog dal (a type of lentil) and chapatis (unleavened bread). After the meal he asked Naren, “How did you like it?” Naren replied, “Quite nice, just like invalid’s food.” Then the Master said to me: “What was that you cooked for him? Next time prepare chana dal and thicker chapatis for him.” And I did so. Naren ate it and was highly pleased.

An Ideal Husband

The Master said about me: “Her name is Sarada. She is Saraswati (the goddess of learning). That is why she loves to adorn herself.” He said to Hriday: “Go and see how much money there is in your chest. Have a pair of beautiful armlets made for her.” The Master was ill at that time, and yet he had those armlets made at a cost of three hundred rupees. But he would not touch money himself.

My mother would grieve, “I have married my Sarada to such a crazy husband that she can’t enjoy ordinary married life or have any children and hear them call her mother.” One day the Master heard her and said: “Don’t grieve over that, Mother. Your daughter will have so many children, you will see, that her ears will ache at hearing the cry of ‘Mother.’ He was quite right. Whatever he said has come to pass.

The Master was interested in nothing but God. When I asked him what I should do with the saris, conchshell bangles, and other things with which he had worshipped me when he performed the *Shodashi* Puja, he said after a little

thought, “Well, you can give them to your own mother” — my father was still living — “but be careful that when making the gifts, you don’t look upon her as your personal mother but as the Mother of the Universe.” I did so. Such was his teaching.

This refers to the occasion when the Master worshipped Holy Mother as a manifestation of the Divine Mother.

The Master’s Manners and Thoughtfulness

How kind was the Master’s behaviour to me! He never spoke a single word that could hurt me. One day at Dakshineswar I carried his food to his room and, thinking it was Lakshmi (his niece), he said, “Shut the door as you go out,” addressing me familiarly as ‘tui’. I replied, “All right.” Hearing my voice, he was startled and cried: “Oh, it is you! I thought it was Lakshmi. Please don’t mind.” I answered, “What does it matter?” He never showed any disrespect towards me, and he was always most considerate of my welfare.

In the Bengali language there are three forms of the second personal pronoun. When addressing a revered elder, ‘apani’ is used. To a person of equal rank and age, one says ‘tumi’. But the familiar form, ‘tui’, is used only when speaking to juniors or servants. Thus it would have been considered disrespectful had the Master knowingly addressed Holy Mother in this manner.

One day he brought me some strands of jute and said: “Twist these into hangers for me, please. I want to keep sweets and luchis in them for the boys.” I made the hangers for him and used the leftover rough fibres as stuffing for a pillow. I placed a mat over some sackcloth and slept with this jute pillow under my head. I slept no worse then than I do now with these fine mattresses and pillows. There is no difference.

Sri Ramakrishna’s Childlike Nature

When the Master was staying at Dakshineswar, Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) and other devotees were very young. One day Rakhal came to the Master and said that he was very hungry. The Master went to the Ganga and cried out: “Oh Gaurdasi, come here! My Rakhal is hungry.” At that time there was no refreshment stall at Dakshineswar. A little later a boat was seen coming up the Ganga. It anchored at the temple ghat. Balaram Babu, Gaurdasi, and some other devotees came out of the boat with some rasagollas. The Master was very happy and shouted for Rakhal. He said: “Come here. Here are sweets. You said you were hungry.” Rakhal became angry and remarked, “Why are you broadcasting my hunger?” The Master said: “What is the harm? You are hungry. You want

something to eat. What is wrong in speaking about it?" The Master had a childlike nature.

An Appreciation

One day while living at Dakshineswar I made a big garland of seven strands with some jasmine and red flowers . I soaked the garland in water in a stone bowl and the buds quickly turned into full blossoms. I then sent the garland to the Kali temple to adorn the image of the Divine Mother. The ornaments were taken off Kali's body and she was decorated with the garland.

The Master came to the temple. He at once fell into an ecstatic mood seeing the beauty of Kali so much enhanced by the flowers. Again and again he said: "Ah! These flowers are nicely set off against the dark complexion of the Divine Mother! Who made the garland?" Someone mentioned me. He said, "Go and bring her to the temple." As I came near the steps I found some of the men devotees there —Balaram Babu, Suren Babu, and others. I felt extremely bashful and became anxious to hide myself. I took shelter behind the maid Vrinda, and was about to go up to the temple by the back steps. The Master immediately noticed this and called out: "Don't use those steps. The other day a fisherwoman was climbing those steps and slipped. She had a terrible accident and fractured her bones. Come by these front steps." The devotees heard those words and made room for me. I entered the temple and found the Master singing, his voice trembling with love and devotion.

The Master's Compassion

A man had a mistress. One day the woman came to the Master and said with repentance: "That man ruined me. Then he robbed me of my money and jewellery." The Master was aware of the innermost contents of people's minds, but still he wanted to hear everything from their own lips. He said to the woman: "Is it true? But he used to give us grand talks about devotion." In the end the woman confessed to him all her sins and was thus released from their evil effects.

Divine Help

Blood dysentery is not a trifling disease. The Master would often be down with it, especially during the rainy season. At one time he was rather seriously ill. I was attending on him. A woman from Varanasi had recently come to Dakshineswar, and she suggested a remedy. I followed her directions and the Master was soon cured. After this the woman could not be found. I never met

her again. She had really helped me a great deal. I inquired about her at Varanasi but could not find her. We often saw that whenever the Master required something, people would come of themselves to Dakshineswar and then disappear just as suddenly.

A Ghost Story

One day the Master went to Beni Pal's garden house (in Sinthi) with Rakhal. He was strolling in the garden when a spirit came to him and said: "Why did you come here? We are being scorched. We cannot endure your presence. Leave this place at once." How could it stand his purity and blazing holiness? The Master walked away with a smile and did not disclose it to anybody.

Immediately after supper he asked someone to call for a carriage, though it had been previously arranged that he would spend the night there. A carriage was brought and he returned to Dakshineswar that very night. Hearing the sound of the carriage near the gate, I strained my ears and heard the Master speaking with Rakhal. I was startled. I thought: "I do not know if he has taken his supper. If not, where can I get food at this late hour?" I always kept something in store for him, at least farina. He sometimes asked for food at odd hours. But I was quite sure of his not coming back that night and so my store was empty. All the gates of the temple garden were barred and locked. It was one o'clock in the morning. He clapped his hands and began to repeat the names of God, and after a while someone opened the gate. Meanwhile I was anxiously thinking about what to do in case he was hungry. As he came in he shouted to me: "Don't be anxious about my food. I have finished my supper." Then he narrated to Rakhal the story of the ghost. Rakhal was startled and said: "Dear me! It was really wise of you not to have told me about it at that time. Otherwise my teeth would have been set on edge through fear. Even now I am seized with fear."

The Picture of Sri Ramakrishna

Several prints were made of the Master's first photograph. The brahmin cook took one of them. The picture was at first very dark, just like the image of Kali, and therefore it wars given to the brahmin. When he left Dakshineswar for some place — I do not remember where — he gave it to me. I kept the photograph with the pictures of other gods and goddesses and worshipped it. At that time I lived on the ground floor of the nahabat. One day the Master came there, and at the sight of the picture he said, "Hello, what is all this?" Lakshmi and I had been cooking under the staircase. Then I saw the Master take in his hand the bel leaves and flowers kept there for worship and offer them to the photograph. He

worshipped the picture. This is the same picture. That brahmin never returned, so the picture remained with me.

This picture is now in the shrine of Holy Mother's house, Udbodhan, Calcutta.

What Did the Master Look Like?

His complexion was like the colour of gold — like that of harital (a yellow orpiment). It blended with the colour of the gold amulet which he wore on his arm. When I rubbed him with oil I could clearly see a lustre coming out of his entire body. People looked at him wonderstruck when he went with slow, steady steps to the Ganga to take his bath. And when he came out of his room at the temple, people stood in line and said to one another, "Ah, there he goes!" It also happened at Kamarpukur. Men and women looked at him with mouths agape whenever he chanced to come out of his house. One day he went for a walk in the direction of the canal known as Bhutir Khal. The women who had gone there to fetch water stared at him and said, "There goes the Master!" The Master was annoyed at this and said to Hriday, "Well, Hridu, please put a veil over my head at once."

The Master was fairly stout. Mathur Babu had given him a low stool on which to sit. It was rather wide, but it was not quite big enough to hold him comfortably when he sat cross-legged on it to eat his meals.

I never saw the Master sad. He was joyous in the company of everyone, whether a boy of five or an old man. I never saw him morose, my child. Ah, what happy days those were! At Kamarpukur he would get up early in the morning and tell me: "Today I shall eat this particular dish. Please cook it for me." With the other women of the family I would arrange his meal accordingly. After a few days he said: "What has come over me? The moment I get up from sleep I say: 'What shall I eat? What shall I eat?'" Then he said to me: ''I have no desire for any particular food. I shall eat whatever you cook for me."

Sri Ramakrishna's Renunciation

Once there was a mistake in the accounts relating to the Master's salary. I asked him to talk to the manager of the temple about it, but he said: "What a shame! Shall I bother myself about accounts?" Once he said to me: "He who utters the name of God never suffers from any misery. No need to speak about you!" These are his very words. Renunciation was his ornament.

You will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was his splendour. We utter his name and eat and enjoy things because he renounced all. People think that his devotees also must be very great, as he was a

man of such complete renunciation.

Ah, me! One day he came to my room in the nahabat. He had no spices in his small bag. He used to chew them now and then. I gave him some to chew there and also handed over to him a few packed in paper to take to his room. He then left, but instead of going to his room, he went straight to the embankment of the Ganga. He did not see the way, nor was he conscious of it. He was repeating, "Mother, shall I drown myself?" I became restless with agony. The river was full to the brim. I was then a young woman and would not go out of my room, and I could not see anyone around. Whom could I send to him? At last I found a brahmin belonging to the Kali temple coming in the direction of my room. Through him I called Hriday, who was then taking his meal. He left his plate, ran to the Master, caught hold of him, and brought him back to his room. A moment more and he would have dropped into the Ganga. Because I put a few spices in his hand he could not find his way. A holy man must not lay things by. His renunciation was one hundred percent.

Once a Vaishnava monk came to the Panchavati. At first he showed a great deal of renunciation. But, alas, finally like a rat, he began to pull and gather various things — pots, cups, jar, grain, rice, pulses, and so forth. The Master noticed it and said one day: "Poor thing! This time he is going to be ruined!" He was about to be entangled in the snare of maya. The Master advised him strongly about renunciation, and further, asked him to leave the place. Then he went away.

The Master's Love for the Devotees

Once Balaram's wife was ill. The Master said to me, "Go to Calcutta and visit her." "How can I go?" I said. "I don't see any carriage or other conveyance here." The Master replied in an excited voice: "What! Balaram's family is in such trouble and you hesitate to go! You will walk to Calcutta. Go on foot." At last a palanquin was brought and I set out from Dakshineswar. Twice I visited her during her illness. On another occasion I went on foot at night from Shyampukur.

The younger Naren used to come to the Master. He was thin and dark, with pockmarks on his face, and the Master was very fond of him. When Patu and Manindra came to see the Master, they were very young, about ten or eleven years old. Once at the Cossipore garden during the Holi festival [a spring festival associated with Krishna] everybody had gone out to play with abir [red powder], but these two would not go. They began to fan the Master, changing hands frequently. They were so young that they could not manage it. They also

massaged the Master's legs. The Master had a cough, so his head ached and he needed constant fanning. He kept saying to them: "Go away now. Go downstairs and play with abir. Everybody has gone." But Patu said: "No, sir, we are not going. We are staying here. How can we go away and leave you?"

They refused to go. The Master could not check his tears. He said: "Oh, my dear, they are my Ramlala (the child Ramachandra), here to take care of me. They are mere children, but they will not leave me, even to enjoy themselves!"

An Accident

The Master used to have great fun with the boys. Naren (Swami Vivekananda) and Baburam (Swami Premananda) would roll on the ground with sidesplitting laughter. Once while living in the Cossipore garden I was climbing the steps, carrying a bowl of milk, when I felt giddy and fell. All the milk was spilled and my heel was dislocated. Naren and Baburam came running and took care of me. There was a great inflammation of the foot. The Master heard of the accident and said to Baburam: "Well, Baburam, it is a nice mess I am in now. Who will cook my food? Who will feed me now?" He was then ill with cancer of the throat and lived only on farina pudding. I used to make it and feed him in his room in the upper story of the house. I had a ring in my nose then. The Master touched his nose and made a sign of a ring by making a circle with his finger in order to indicate me. He then said, "Baburam, can you put her (making the sign) in a basket and carry her on your shoulder to this room?" Naren and Baburam were convulsed with sidesplitting laughter. Thus he used to cut jokes with them. After three days the swelling subsided. Then they helped me to go upstairs with his meals. Golap-ma made the pudding during those three days and Naren fed him.

Body and Soul

Everything — husband, wife, or even the body — is only illusory. These are all shackles of illusion. Unless you can free yourself from these bondages you will never be able to go to the other shore of the world. Even this attachment to the body, the identification of the self with the body, must go. What is this body, my child? It is nothing but three pounds of ashes when it is cremated. Why so much vanity about it? However strong or beautiful this body may be, its culmination is in those three pounds of ashes. And still people are so attached to it. Glory to God!

The Master would say: "Musk forms in the navel of the deer. Being fascinated with its smell, the deer run here and there. They do not know where the

fragrance comes from. Likewise, God resides in the human body and man does not know it. Therefore he searches everywhere for bliss, not knowing that it is already within him. God alone is real. All else is false."

Practise, Practise, Practise!

Can one have the vision of God every day? The Master used to say: "Does an angler catch a big carp every day the moment he sits with his rod? Arranging everything about him, he sits with the rod and concentrates. Once in a while a big carp swallows the hook, but many times he is disappointed. Don't relax the practices for that reason." Do more japam.

Why are you so restless, my child? Why don't you stick onto what you have? Always remember, "I have at least a Mother, if none else." Do you remember those words of the Master? He said he would reveal himself to all that take refuge in him — reveal himself at least on their last day. He will draw all to himself.

"I Will Be Worshipped in Every House"

Once when the Master was lying ill at Cossipore a few devotees brought some offerings for Mother Kali at the Dakshineswar temple. On hearing that the Master was at Cossipore they offered everything they had brought before a picture of the Master, and then partook of the prasad. When the Master heard this, he remarked, "All these things were brought for the great Mother of the Universe, and they have offered them here (meaning himself)'." I was frightened very much at this and thought: "He is suffering from this dangerous disease. Who knows what might happen? What a calamity! Why did they do it?"

The Master too referred to this incident again and again. Afterwards, at a late hour in the night, he said to me: "You will see how in the course of time I will be worshipped in every house. You will see everyone accepting this (meaning himself). This is surely going to happen." That was the only day I heard him using the first person pronoun with reference to himself. Usually he would speak of himself not as "I" or "me," but as "this case" or as "belonging to this," pointing to his body.

Visions of the Master

When the Master passed away I also wanted to leave my body. He appeared before me and said: "No, you must remain here. There are many things to be done." I myself realized later on that this was true. I had so many things to do. The Master used to say: "The people of Calcutta live like worms crawling in

darkness. You will guide them." He said that he would live for another hundred years in a subtle body, in the hearts of the devotees. He further said that he would have many devotees among white people.

After the passing away of the Master I was at first greatly frightened, for I wore a sari with thin red borders and had gold bangles on my wrist, which made me afraid of people's criticism (*Holy Mother at first wanted to follow this custom, but Sri Ramakrishna appeared in a vision and told her not to do so as he was not really dead.)*

One day the Master appeared before me and asked me to feed him khichuri (rice and lentils cooked together). I cooked the dish and offered it to Raghuvir *(the tutelary deity of Sri Ramakrishna's family at Kamarpukur)* in the temple. Then I mentally fed the Master with it.

On my way to Vrindaban I saw the Master at the window of my train compartment and he said to me, "Take special care of the amulet lest you lose it." He had given me his own amulet, and I was wearing it on my arm. I used to worship it. Later I gave it to the Belur Math, and now they worship it there.

"In Every Age I Come Back"

The Master said he would come again after a hundred years. Meanwhile, for those hundred years he would live in the hearts of those who love him. Standing on the semicircular verandah of Dakshineswar, the Master said this, pointing towards the northwest. I told him I could not come again. Lakshmi also said.she would not come again, even if she were chopped into shreds like tobacco leaves! The Master laughed and said: "How can you avoid coming? Our roots are twined together like the kalmi plant.Pull one stem and the whole clump will come forward."

The Master used to say: "You have come to the garden to eat mangoes. Very well, eat them, enjoy them, and go. What does it matter to you how many branches and leaves there are?"

LAKSHMI DEVI

Lakshmi Devi (1864-1926) was the daughter of Sri Ramakrishna's brother Rameshwar. Soon after her marriage she became a widow and went to live at Dakshineswar with Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. In the later part of her life she drew many disciples around her and inspired them with stories and teachings of the Master.

At Dakshineswar we (Holy Mother and Lakshmi) used to live in the nahabat (a small concert tower at the temple garden). When the Master wished to

indicate to his visitors about the Mother, he would make a circle with his finger at the tip of the nose. This was because the Mother wore a nose ring. He used to refer to the nahabat as a cage and to us as Shuk-Sari [two birds in Indian folklore who were adept in talking about Krishna's glories]. When fruits and sweets that had been offered to the Divine Mother were brought to the Master, he would remind Brother Ramlal: "Don't forget that there are two birds in that cage. Give them some fruits and peas." Newcomers would take the Master's words literally. Even Master Mahashay (the recorder of The Gospel of Sri RamaKrishna) did so at first.

Village women would come to visit the Mother, and sometimes the Master could overhear their conversation. Once he said to the Mother: "These women come and stroll by the goose pond. Seeing me they talk among themselves and I hear what they are saying. They say: 'This man is good, but one thing is strange! He does not sleep with his wife at night.' Please don't pay any heed to their talk. They are worldly women. They may teach you how to divert my mind towards the world through tricks or medicine. Please don't follow their advice. I have given myself completely to God." The Mother was embarrassed and reassured the Master: "Oh, no, no. I won't pay any attention to them."

How we managed in that tiny room of the nahabat, I sometimes wonder. It was the Master's divine play! Usually it was shared by Holy Mother, another girl, and me. Sometimes Gopaler-ma, who was a large woman, or other women devotees from Calcutta would stay with us. Moreover, we had to store our groceries, cooking vessels, dishes, and even the water jar in that room. Since the Master had a weak stomach we also had to store the food for his special diet.

The Master did not sleep much at night. When it was still dark outside he would move around the temple garden, and while passing near the nahabat he would call: "O Lakshmi, O Lakshmi. Get up. Ask your aunt to get up also. How long will you sleep? It is almost dawn. The crows and cuckoos are about to sing. Chant the name of the Divine Mother."

Sometimes in winter, when the Master would call me, Mother, while lying under her quilt, would whisper to me: "Keep quiet. He has no sleep in his eyes. It is not the right time to get up, and the birds have not yet started singing. Don't respond." But if the Master did not get any response, he would pour water under the doorsill, and since we slept on the floor we had to get up without delay. Even so, sometimes our beds got wet.

The Master lost some hair from the front of his head because of excessive heat in his body, and some of his hair and beard turned grey. He did not care to live long, to be an old man. He would say, "I don't want to hear people saying that there is an 'old monk' in Rashmani's temple garden." "Don't say that," the

Mother replied. “You are not old. Do you think you are old enough to leave this world? Moreover, if you live here as an old monk, people will say a ‘wise monk’ lives in Rashmani’s Kali temple.” The Master replied: “Pooh! Who is going to call me a wise monk? Anyhow, I can’t bear it if anybody calls me ‘old fellow.’

After a short period of marriage I became a widow and went back to my father’s home. I was then a beautiful young girl. One day the Master told me: “Do your duties and practise religion at home. Do not travel to the holy places by yourself. Who knows who might harm you? Live with your aunt. Life in the world is not safe.”

When the Master was in his village, every evening he sat by the door of his parental home, watching the people as they passed along the street. All the women had to go that way to bring water from the tank. They would come with their jugs and seeing him at the door, they would sit down in the little yard in front, with their water jugs beside them, and forget everything in the joy of hearing him talk or sing of God. Fearing lest they might be neglecting their duties, he asked about them. One girl said: “I have a cow. When I heard that you were coming, I cut straw enough to last a month and filled my room with it.” To another he said, “How is your baby?” “Oh! I forgot,” she exclaimed. “I left it with a neighbour.” She had walked more than a mile to come and see him.

One day the Master said to the women, “Now, today you must sing and I will listen.” They all remained silent. No one dared utter a sound. But there was one girl whom the Master loved very much, so much that whenever she did not come he would send for her. As soon as she saw that no one else would sing, she sang a song in a weak high-pitched, quavering voice. All the other girls began to laugh at her, but when she had finished, the Master was delighted. “See how great is her devotion,” he exclaimed. “Just because I asked her, she has sung so frankly and simply. She alone among you has true devotion.”

The Master could not stand to see women who were shameless and wanton. He said to the Mother: “Don’t be like them. They have one leg under a bel tree and the other under a banyan tree. Their behaviour is shameless. Women must be unassuming. Modesty is the ornament of women.”

Chinu Shankhari, who was well known in Kamarpukur, was a boyhood friend of the Master. He was a devout Vaishnava and had acquired some supernatural powers through spiritual discipline. Holding the Master he would say, “Gadai, when I see you I think of Gauranga.” Some of our Kamarpukur neighbours went to Dakshineswar for a holy bath in the Ganga, and they told the Master a story about Chinu’s supernatural powers. They said that one day some guests came to Chinu’s house and asked for food, expressing a desire to eat a sour preparation of fish with mango. Since it was not the season for mangoes, Chinu was very

worried and prayed to the Lord that he might be able to fulfill the desire of his guests. At the last moment, unexpectedly and inexplicably, he obtained some mangoes and fed his guests with great joy.

The Master listened to the story, and when he went to Kamarpukur he said to Chinu: “Shame! Shame! Fie on your supernatural powers. Do not use them again. People will exploit you and disturb your spiritual life. Please don’t pay any heed to those powers. Otherwise your mind will fall to a lower state.”

The Master never visited Puri. One day Balaram Babu brought some prasad of Lord Jagannath. The Master touched it with his head and saluted the Lord. He was then in an ecstatic mood. After a while he said: “I went to the place of Jagannath. There everything is great and vast — the vast ocean and long, wide roads. If this body goes there, it will not come back.”

When I was at Dakshineswar with the Mother, she told me that the Master had written a mantram on her tongue, and she suggested that I ask him to do the same for me. I said: “I am too shy to ask him. There are so many visitors in his room.”

Then another day I went to salute the Master. I didn’t say anything, but he asked me of his own accord, “What deity do you love most?” Delighted at his question, I replied, “Radha-Krishna.” He then wrote the mantram on my tongue. I had a rosary of tulsi beads around my neck which Sister Prasanna of Kamarpukur’s Laha family had given me with the comment that they were very becoming to me.

Sometime earlier the Mother and I had received some instructions about the worship of the Divine Mother from an old monk whose name was Swami Purnananda. He was a very handsome person, very calm and quiet. When the Mother told the Master about it, he said: “It is all right. I have given the right mantram to Lakshmi.”

While I was in Dakshineswar I would sometimes remember Mother Shitala, who is another form of the Divine Mother and one of our family deities. At that time if sweets were presented to the Master he would say: “Feed these sweets to Lakshmi. It will be a grand offering to Mother Shitala, because Lakshmi is part of her.” Once he asked Girish Babu to do this.

Whenever there was kirtan in his room, the Master would ask Brother Ramlal to open the door facing the nahabat. He would say: “A current of devotion and bliss will flow here. If they do not see or hear, how will they learn?” The Mother used to watch through a tiny hole in the bamboo screen, and that made her happy. Sometimes the Master would comment with a laugh, “O Ramlal, the opening in your aunt’s screen is getting bigger and bigger.”

The Master used to tell the Mother and me stories from the Ramayana and the

Mahabharata, such as the story of King Nala, and he would then question us to see if we had understood them. He would also make me repeat them, and afterwards he would remark with satisfaction, “That is why I call you a shuk (parrot).”

The Master always encouraged us to practise spiritual disciplines. He would tell us: “Pray unceasingly. Be sincere. Don’t show your spiritual disciplines to others. If the character is not good, what good will japam do? Young women should be very careful. Be pure. The trees suck water from the earth through their roots, unperceived. Likewise, some people show a religious nature outwardly but secretly enjoy lustful things. Don’t be a hypocrite.”

One time he said to me: “If you cannot remember God, think of me. That will do.”

All through his life the Master had stomach trouble. When Grandma (Sri Ramakrishna’s mother) was living in Dakshineswar, the Master would salute her every morning. Grandma was a large woman and very beautiful, but she was also old-fashioned and very shy. Even before her youngest son (Sri Ramakrishna) she would cover her face with a veil. When he came she would ask him, “How is your stomach?” The Master would reply, “Not very good.” Grandma would then advise: “Don’t take the prasad of Mother Kali. (It was very spicy) As long as your stomach is not all right your wife will cook plain soup and rice for you. Please eat only that.”

Sometimes the Master would get tired of eating invalid’s food every day and would ask his mother to cook one or two dishes and season them as she used to do in Kamarpukur. So occasionally Grandma cooked for him and the Master enjoyed it.

The Master used to encourage women to cook. “It is a good occupation for the mind,” he would say. “Sita was a good cook, and so were Draupadi and Parvati. Mother Lakshmi would herself cook and feed others.”

After the death of her two older sons, Grandma became somewhat passive and withdrawn. Furthermore, she would not take her lunch until she had heard the noon whistle of the Alambazar Jute Mill. As soon as it sounded she would exclaim: “Oh! There is the whistle of heaven. That is the signal for offering food to Lakshmi and Narayana.” A problem would arise on Sundays, however, when the jute mill was closed. No whistle was blown at noon, and consequently she would not eat. This worried the Master very much, and he would lament: “Oh dear! My old mother will refuse her food today and she will be weak.” Brother Hriday would say to the Master: “Don’t be anxious, Uncle. When Grandma is hungry she will eat of her own accord.” But the Master would reply: “Oh no. I am her son. It is my duty to look after my old mother.” With much coaxing the

Master would persuade his mother to eat the prasad of Krishna.

One day Brother Hriday made a high-pitched sound by blowing through a pipe. He then said to Grandma: “There, Grandma, did you hear the whistle of heaven? Now please eat your food.” But Grandma laughed and said: “Oh no. You made the sound with your pipe.” Everyone laughed. When Grandma passed away the Master wept.

The Mother used to carry the Master’s meals to his room. Pointing to her, sometimes the Master would say in a joking manner: “Luckily, I have the shade of this tree. Otherwise, who would prepare food for me? Such a man who cannot manage his own cloth and he has married!”

One day I went with the Mother to carry the Master his food. Rakhal and others who were with him immediately left the room, leaving us alone there. The Master was lying on his bed in samadhi, but he looked so devoid of life that the Mother, having long been anxious for his health, began to weep, thinking he had left the body. Then she remembered that he had once said to her that if she ever found him in this state, she was just to touch his feet and that would bring him back. So she began to rub his feet. Rakhal and the others, hearing the weeping, hurried back into the room, and they too began to rub him vigourously.

This brought him back to consciousness and, opening his eyes, he asked with surprise what the matter was. Then, realizing their fears, he smiled and said: “I was in the land of the white people. Their skin is white, their hearts are white, and they are simple and sincere. It is a very beautiful country. I think I shall go there.” “But you will get very hungry if you go there,” the Mother replied with anxious solicitude. Then the Master struck his forehead with his hand two or three times and said to the Mother: “Oh! You are so foolish! You do not know anything.”

One night the Master was filled with the spiritual mood of Radha and had so identified himself with her that he decided to go to the arbour to meet Krishna. Coming out of his room, he entered the rose garden. He had no outward consciousness. He soon got caught in the rose bushes and was scratched all over from the thorns, and there he stood. The night watchman found him and woke us. At once I went to the temple manager and brought him there. Many others, awakened by the noise, crowded around. The Mother also came there and burst into tears. This was the first time that she was seen in public. When the Master was carried to his room he said: “I am going to the arbour. Why are you troubling me? Let me go.” After this, the Mother and I began to sleep in his room. A couple of days later, however, he said to us: “Why are you suffering this way? It is so hot now. You had better sleep in the nahabat.” We obeyed.

Once the Master asked me to eat some of Mother Kali’s prasad. I was

reluctant to eat a piece of fish because a Hindu widow is a strict vegetarian, but the Master insisted [knowing that Lakshmi was the goddess Shitala]. He said to me: “It is prasad. Don’t hesitate. Eat. If you don’t listen to me you will have to be born again. You may get an ugly, fat husband who will force you to lead a worldly life against your will.” “Well,” I said, “I certainly don’t want to be involved in maya again. Perhaps it is better to eat this nonvegetarian prasad.”

What love the Master had for the devotees! Once Balaram Babu came to Dakshineswar by boat with his wife and children. They visited with the Master for a while, and they all left for Calcutta in the afternoon. The Master himself went to the chandni ghat to see them off. Smiling at them, he said, “Come again.”

Their boat pulled out into the river, and the Master stood there watching until they had gone quite a distance. In the meantime a storm began to blow and the sky quickly became dark with clouds. I noticed that the Master was quite worried. He started pacing back and forth like a restless boy, his anxiety increasing as he watched the progress of the violently rocking boat.

Impatiently he was asking everyone: “What will happen? Will Balaram and his family survive this storm? Alas! What will happen? People will say that Balaram went to see that worthless, unfortunate holy man in Dakshineswar and lost his life coining back. Tell me, what will happen?” Gradually the boat disappeared from sight. The Master returned to his room, his face gloomy, his mind very much disturbed, and he resumed his restless pacing, lamenting: “Mother, will you tarnish my face? Won’t you hear my prayer? Mother, what will happen?”

Seeing the Master’s state of mind, Yogin, without saying anything, set out for Calcutta in the midst of the storm to get news of Balaram Babu. He took a share-carriage from Alambazar, and within a few hours he was back (by then night had fallen) and was able to report to the Master that Balaram Babu and his family had arrived home safely.

Yogin said to him: “It is by your grace that they had no mishap on the river and reached home safely. Seeing your anxiety, I went myself for news of them. They said the boat was rolling heavily in the storm and at one point almost overturned, but it somehow regained its balance.”

The Master was overjoyed to hear the news. Then he said to Yogin slowly: “What did you say? By my grace? Don’t repeat to anyone what you have said. Keep it in your mind. Remember! By the grace of the Mother they reached home safely.”

I still remember the day he passed away at the Cossipore garden house. He was seated on his bed, reclining against a pillow. It was noon. All were silent.

Everyone thought that his voice was completely gone. But as soon as the Mother and I entered his room he slowly whispered: “You have come. Listen, I am going somewhere across the water, a long distance.” The Mother burst into tears.

Again he whispered: “Don’t worry. They (pointing to the disciples) will look after you just as they are taking care of me. Keep watch over Lakshmi. She will be your companion.”

Even now I remember his face on that last day, seated on his bed, merged in samadhi, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

RAMLAL CHATTOPADHYAY

(From: Sri Ramakrishna O Antaranga Prasanga, by Kamal Krishna Mittra (Dakshineswar: K. K. Mittra), 1932; Udbodhan (Udbodhan Office Calcutta), vol. 49, no. 10,1947)

Ramlal Chattopadhyay (1858-1933) was a son of Sri Ramakrishna’s elder brother Rameshwar. When he was in his early twenties he came to Dakshineswar and became a priest of the Kali temple as well as an attendant of Sri Ramakrishna. He was known among the disciples and devotees of the Master as Ramlal Dada. Ramlal’s reminiscences were recorded by Kamal Krishna Mittra in his diary and the dates are given at the end of each entry.

See God with Open Eyes

If anyone would meditate or close his eyes while repeating his mantram inside the Kali temple, the Master would tell him: “What are you doing? You are seated here in front of the living Mother. See her to your heart’s content. Practise those spiritual disciplines elsewhere, where you cannot get this direct experience. Suppose you have gone home to visit your mother. Would you sit before her with closed eyes and repeat her name?” (1 October 1931)

The Power of the Name

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “The human mind cannot comprehend the divine sport (lila) of God. By a mere wish he makes the impossible possible and the possible impossible.” Concerning the power of the name, Sri Ramakrishna once said to Ishan Mukherjee: “Well, if there is a collision between two trains, some people will die and some will survive. Those who started their journey chanting the name of Mother Durga survived, and those who did not, died. According to somebody’s karma, his foot is supposed to be pierced by a plough, but as he started his journey chanting the name of Mother Durga, a blade of

kusha grass entered his foot instead. This shows that he escaped major injury through the power of the Mother's name. What do you think about it?" Ishan: "Yes, sir. It is possible." (31 May 1931)

Days in Dakshineswar

The barber came to the temple garden on Mondays to cut the Master's hair. [Sri Ramakrishna could not be shaved with an open razor because his skin was very soft, so the barber would just trim his beard.]

Hriday served the Master wholeheartedly. The Master used to say that that type of service was rare and that even parents could not serve their children so well. But later Hriday gave the Master a lot of trouble. It was interesting to watch a quarrel between them. When the Master got angry with Hriday he would scold him using very strong words. Hriday usually kept quiet, but occasionally he would say: "Uncle, what are you saying? I am your nephew." And again when Hriday became angry, the Master would keep quiet. After such quarrelling I would think they would never speak to each other again. But after a short while they would smile and talk and tease each other.

This is the room [Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar] where the Master sang, danced, talked, and joked with people. He was full of fun. Sometimes he made us laugh so hard that our stomachs would ache. Like a child, he would ask the devotees: "Well, I have actually seen and heard all these funny things. Is it wrong for me to tell you?" The devotees would say: "No, sir. It is not wrong. Please tell us more. We love it." (9 and 13 November 1931)

Sri Ramakrishna's Dancing

Ramlal demonstrated how the Master would sing and dance in ecstasy. When the Master would sing this song, "O Mother, this world is a marketplace of crazy people," he would dance this way: He would raise his left hand up, and his right hand would be parallel to his left shoulder. Then he would bend and twist his right knee, stamp his right foot on the floor, and turn at the waist. When the Master was in a great mood, he would dance back and forth and also in a circle. When he would sing, "O Mother, you live in various moods," he would dance, clapping his hands, moving his waist, and keeping the rhythm with his feet.

Nowadays the songs the Master used to sing are sung in different tunes, and it is jarring to my ears.

(8 May 1929 and 26 May 1931)

Sri Ramakrishna's Singing

If someone broke the rhythm while singing, the Master would cry out “Oohu, oohu.” But if the person sang with devotion and deep absorption, such irregularity would not disturb him. He was not interested in ragas, raginis,or the science of music. The Master sang in ecstasy, and his voice was soft, sweet, and melodious. Sometimes when he was singing, he would improvise some joyous phrase. I saw the Master enter into samadhi many times while singing. Sometimes he would ask me or Swamiji to sing, and while listening he would again enter into samadhi.

When I sing accompanied by drums, my mind dwells on the rhythm of the drums, and for that reason it is hard for me to sing wholeheartedly for God. Noticing this the Master used to say: “Suppose a man is singing kirtan rhythmically, repeating, ‘Nitai amar mata hati (My Nitai is a mad elephant).’ Gradually when his emotion deepens, he repeats, ‘Hati.’ And at last he goes into samadhi, saying only ‘Ha.’

(20 May 1929)

Sri Ramakrishna’s Daily Routine

The Master usually got up at three or three-thirty in the morning, and as soon as he got out of bed I would wake up. When he went to the pine grove I would either lead the way or follow him with a jug and towel. He would then go to the pond, throw off his cloth, and sit on the ghat, dangling his legs. I would bring him water and he would wash his face, hands, and feet. After covering himself with his towel, he would return to his room. Meanwhile I would quickly scour the jug, wash his cloth, and then hurry after him. In his room he would put on a fresh cloth and go to the southern verandah to brush his teeth.... After that he would take a little Ganga water on his palm and sprinkle it on his head, saying, “Brahma-Vari, Brahma-Vari! Ganga, Ganga! Hari Om Tat Sat! “ Then he would take some prasad of Jagannath and Kali and also a few bits of dried bel leaves that had been offered at the shrine of Tarakeshwar Shiva, which he kept in a small bag. With joined palms he would salute all the holy pictures in his room and then sit down on the small cot.

The Master was usually in one of two moods. On some days he would observe all the traditional methods of purification; on other days he would completely ignore them. When he was in this second mood, he would not even wash himself properly. He would ask for food as soon as he returned from the pond in the morning and reluctantly wash his hands with water after eating. One day he explained: “You see, Mother keeps me sometimes in the mood of a child, sometimes in the mood of a madman, and sometimes in the mood of a carefree soul.”

At about nine or ten in the morning, after he had finished talking with the devotees, I would rub oil on his body. But I would put oil on his head only with his permission. One day, without asking first, I put my hand on his head in order to rub oil on his hair. He became angry and scolded me, and then he suddenly went into samadhi. I was struck dumb with wonder, and my heart began to pound in fear. After a long time he gave a deep sigh and came back to the normal conscious plane. Then he told me: “Do not put your hand on my head that way. There is no telling what spiritual condition I may be in. Ask for permission before you touch my head.”

On another day, seeing a thread on his hair, I automatically reached out my hand to remove it. Again he got very angry and said: “What! You are touching my head again?” I had forgotten his warning. ... After oil had been rubbed on him, he would go to the chandni ghat on the Ganga for a bath and then go to the Kali temple. There he would decorate the Mother with flowers or offer flowers and bel leaves at her feet. Sometimes he would put flowers on his own head and then merge into samadhi.

The Master’s Frugality

The Master suffered from stomach trouble during the rainy season, and he would then eat only rice, bitter squash curry, and soup. Hriday and I slept on the floor of the Master’s room. Once at midnight we woke up to find him cutting vegetables and gathering rice and spices. Hriday said to the Master: “Uncle, what are you doing? Can’t you do that in the morning? Both of us are here. We will do everything for you. Why don’t you go to bed and sleep? Besides, Uncle, your household work makes me laugh. That quantity of vegetables and rice is hardly enough for one person. You are so miserly!” The Master replied: “Look, when I woke up, at first I sat quietly. Then I thought that it was not good to sit idle, so I should do some household work. Some people do not know how much food I eat, so they cook too much and waste it. Do you know why I was preparing those things? I have seen the temple officials waste so much food on their plates.

“Look, Hriday, you are son of a high class brahmin, and for a morsel of food and some money you are now working at this Kali temple. If you had land and money in Sihar, would you come here for a job? Learn how to be frugal. Otherwise the goddess of fortune will leave you.” “You are right, Uncle,” said Hriday.

One morning the Master asked someone to cut a twig for him so that he could clean his teeth. The person brought three twigs. The Master took one and said to

him: “Rascal! I asked you to bring one twig. Why did you bring three? However, save those two.” The next morning the Master asked the same person for another twig. When he was about to go to the garden, the Master said: “Where are you going? Why don’t you give me one of those that you brought yesterday?” Then the Master continued: “Without checking the stock, why are you running to get a new one? Have you created that tree? You are about to break its branches at your own whim! Only the Creator knows how difficult it is to create. You are dullheaded. Learn how to work methodically. Do not waste anything.” (8 October 1931)

Captain

The Master used to say: “Even the dogs and cats of the Dakshineswar temple garden are blessed. Look, they are eating Mother’s prasad, seeing the Ganga and drinking its water, and roaming around the temples.” There was a dog in the temple garden that the Master called Captain. Captain quite often sat on the front terrace of the Mother’s temple. Whenever the Master would call him, the dog would come and roll at his feet. Then the Master would feed him luchis [fried bread] and sandesh [a sweet]. The Master once said: “Look, there are so many dogs here but none of them sits in front of the Mother except Captain. I have not seen any other dog that sits on the steps near the Ganga and drinks Ganga water. Captain has been bom as a dog as the result of a curse. He had some good samskaras [tendencies] in his previous life, so he is here. He is a blessed soul.” (16 October 1931)

Sri Ramakrishna Was All-Knowing

I was an attendant of the Master. Gradually the disciples of the Master began to come to Dakshineswar, so one day I said to the Master: “I haven’t visited Kamarpukur for a long time. I think I should go there and clear the taxes on our property.” The Master said, “If you go, then who will look after me?” I replied: “Well, these devotees are coming regularly and they often stay here at night. They can look after you. Besides, I won’t be gone long. As soon as I finish my work, I shall return.” The Master then said: “Yes, they are coming, but they do not know my way of life. They cannot serve me like you.”

The next morning when I asked the Master’s permission again, he thought for a while and then said: “No, you won’t be able to go to Kamarpukur. It is not the will of the Mother that you should leave me and go there.” I told him: “But I am ready to go. I only need the temple manager’s permission.” Hearing this, the Master made a circle in the air with his finger and wrote something there. Then

he said: “Ramlal, you won’t be able to go to Kamarpukur. Go to the manager and see what he says.” When I approached the manager, he said: “No, it’s not possible for you to leave now because the staff needed to carry on the day-to-day work of the temples is short-handed.” Thus, my visit to Kamarpukur was cancelled.

Once the Master told me:” Offer whoever comes here, whether known or unknown, a little prasad and a glass of Ganga water. You will not have to do anything else. This service to the devotees will give you the result of japam, austerity, and sacrifice.” So I follow what the Master said to me and it gives me joy.

(13 November 1931 and 23 October 1931)

The Christian Doctrine of Sin

One day the Master said to me, “Ramlal, go to the Alambazar market and buy some tobacco, fennel seed, and cubeb.” I went to the market and came across a Christian missionary who was preaching Christianity on the street and distributing a pamphlet, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” in Bengali. I took a copy and returned to the Master. He asked: “What is that book? Please read to me.” After listening for some time, the Master said: “Stop. You need not read anymore. This book only talks about sin and sin. There is a saying, ‘As one thinks, so one becomes.’” He further said: “God is the ruler of this universe and all beings are his children. O my mind, know it for certain, you are a child of God.”

(28 October 1931)

At the Star Theatre

One day Girish Ghosh came to the Master and asked: “Sir, we are presenting the play Daksha Yajna at the Star Theatre tonight. Would you like to see it?” The Master replied, “Yes, Ramlal and I will go.” Then the Master and I hired a carriage and left for the theatre. By mistake we entered through the back way, which was dirty, and found that no one was there. Seeing an actress nearby, the Master said, “Hello, could you inform Girish that some visitors have come from Dakshineswar?” Girish immediately came and fell at the Master’s feet and remained on the ground for a few minutes. The Master asked Girish to get up, and when he did his shirt was dirty. The Master began to brush his shirt with his hand and said, “Ah, you have spoiled this clean shirt!”

Girish took us upstairs and arranged for box seats, and then he called the actresses, who at that time were putting on their makeup. They came

immediately. Girish told them: “Bow down at the Master’s feet. You won’t get another chance such as this to purify yourselves.” Then the Master said to them: “Enough! O blissful mothers, please get up. You are giving joy to people by your singing and dancing. Now go back to your dressing room for your makeup.”

During the first scene Girish appeared on stage in the role of King Daksha and announced, “Today I shall remove the name of Shiva from this world.” At this, the Master said to me, “O Ramlal, what is this rascal saying?” When that scene was over, Girish came to the Master and asked with folded hands, “Sir, how did you enjoy the part of King Daksha?” The Master said: “Look Girish, you were saying, ‘I shall remove Shiva’s name from this world.’ Such words should not come from your lips.” Girish replied: “Sir, what can I do? I had to say all these things just for the sake of my stomach.” Then the Master said, “Yes, I understand.”

Girish left, and the next scene began. When Sati came on stage, the Master went into samadhi. He remained in samadhi till the end of the play, except for a few moments when he exclaimed, “Ah! Ah!” After the play was over I escorted the Master to the carriage, but he was in an intoxicated mood. Girish again came, bowed down to the Master, and asked, “Sir, how did you enjoy the play?” The Master could not talk. We left for Dakshineswar. After regaining normal consciousness, the Master asked me, “Ramlal, tell me about the last part of the play.” I told him the story. He said: “Ah, I could not see the whole play. However, after listening to you I am satisfied.” (8 October 1931)

The Master’s Ecstasy on the Street

One day Sri Ramakrishna and I were returning from Calcutta by horse carriage. When the carriage reached the crossroad at Baranagore, he asked, “Is it Baranagore?” “Yes,” I replied. He said: “I am extremely hungry. Do you have any money in your pocket?” “Yes, I have.” I always took some money with me whenever I went anywhere with the Master, since occasionally he would ask me to give coins to the beggars on the street. Then he asked, “Could you buy some kachuri from Fagu’s shop?” I replied: “Of course. Please wait, I shall bring it very quickly.”

When I came back with the food, I found the Master was not in the carriage. I asked the coachman, “Where has the Master gone?” He replied, “The Master left the carriage some time ago and went in that direction.” Leaving the food in the carriage, I ran and found the Master walking rapidly. I called: “Master, where are you going? I have brought the food for you.” But he did not listen to me at all. I then grabbed his hand and said: “Where are you going alone? Let us return to

our carriage." The Master exclaimed: "What! What! Who are you?" Then he took a couple of deep breaths and rubbed his head. Gradually he became normal. Then he told me: "Look. Let me tell you something: Before you go somewhere leaving me alone, say to me: 'I am going. Please sit here. Don't go anywhere until I return.' If I agree, then this kind of thing will not happen."

When the Master was in samadhi his gaze was fixed, as is seen in his photograph. Tears of joy would flow from the outer corners of his eyes and roll down his moustache, beard, and chest. Sometimes after samadhi he would talk in a mysterious language that no one could understand. (21 April 1931)

I Doubted the Master

I used to address the Master as 'apani' because I did not feel that he was my own uncle. As I could not understand his behaviour, moods, or samadhi, a doubt arose in my mind. I thought: "The Master is an unlettered person, but still all great scholars are defeated by him. Is he truly an Incarnation of God?" One day I said to the Master: "A doubt has arisen in my mind about you. I am confused." The,Master replied: "Look, Ramlal. One cannot understand this mystery through the intellect. You have seen jilipis [a sweet]. From the outsidfe they look dry, so how would one know that they are full of sweet syrup inside? If you think of me as an avatar [a Divine Incarnation], then you are blessed that you have the opportunity to serve me. Besides, you are my blood relative. What else do you want?"

In those days I did not recognize the Master's greatness. Although we were his blood relatives, we did not realize who he was. But through his grace, I have this much faith: that since we were born into his family, we have found refuge at his lotus feet. From his own lips I heard that when a man attains illumination, seven generations of his family before and after him become liberated. And to think that the Lord himself was born in our family as a human being! Through his grace and his holy company we too have had many visions and spiritual experiences. Thus he gave us faith and devotion for him. (23 October 1931)

Sri Ramakrishna as the Kalpataru

On the afternoon of 1 January 1886, at the Cossipore garden house, the Master said to me: "Ramlal, today I feel better. Let us go for a walk in the courtyard." I said: "Yes, you look better. Let us go." The Master put on his cap that covered his ears and carried a cane in his hand. I put on a shawl and carefully helped' him down the stairs. After strolling along the garden path, the Master stood on the lawn and went into ecstasy. He was surrounded by the devotees, who began

showering flowers on him and chanting hymns. He told them: “What more shall I say to you? Be illumined!” Then he blessed some devotees by touching their chests. To others he said that they would have to wait for a while.

I was then standing behind the Master and thinking: “All these devotees have got some spiritual experiences, but what have I achieved? I only carried the Master’s waterpot and towel.” As soon as this thought crossed my mind, he looked at me and said: “Ramlal, what are you thinking? Come here.” He pushed aside my shawl and touched my chest, saying, “Now see.” It is hard for me to describe that wonderful, luminous form. Before that, during my meditation I could see with my mind’s eye only a part of my Chosen Deity. When I saw his feet I could not see his face; and again, when I saw his form from the face to the waist, I could not see his feet. Moreover, whatever I saw never seemed to be alive. But no sooner had the Master touched me that day than the whole form of my Chosen Deity appeared in my heart as a living presence, looking benign and effulgent.

(1 January 1930; Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master, 5th edition, 1979, p. 1025)

“My Hands and Feet Are Burning”

At the Cossipore garden house during the Master’s last illness, Swami Niranjanananda would sit on the staircase to prevent anyone from entering the Master’s room. But the Master told his disciples to allow me to visit him at any time. One day when I went to see him he got up and told me: “Ramlal, my hands and feet are burning. Please bring some Ganga water and sprinkle it on me.” He was extremely restless. I asked, “What happened?” He replied: “I came into this world secretly with a few close devotees, and now Ram (Ram Chandra Datta) is spreading my name. He brings all sorts of people here and asks me to touch and bless them. How much burden can I carry? I got this disease by taking the sins of these people upon myself. Look, I shall not stay in this world any longer.” I consoled him: “No, no. You will not have to receive any visitors or touch anybody.” Then I brought the Ganga water and washed his hands and feet, and gradually he calmed down.

The Master’s body was very pure, and he was all-compassionate and a saviour of souls. While touching his feet, people prayed for so many things. Many people even criticized him, but the Master carried their spiritual responsibilities as well. When the doctor saw the bleeding in the Master’s throat, he forbade him to talk. But the Master talked till the last for the good of the devotees. (1 January 1930)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

(From: Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master, by Swami Saradananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras), vol. 2, 1979; Ramakrishna and His Disciples, by Christopher Isherwood (Methuen & Co., Ltd. London), 1965; Life of Swami Vivekananda, by His Eastern & Western Disciples (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta), vol. 1,1979; The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati), vols. VI & VII, 1968-69)

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1881 when he was a college student, and he associated closely with the Master for the next five years. As the foremost disciple of the Master, his life was closely linked with the later part of the Master's life. Swami Vivekananda's reminiscences are thus scattered all over his biography. In 1893 he brought the message of Vedanta to the West, and in 1897 he founded the Ramakrishna Mission.

First Meeting with Sri Ramakrishna

My first visit to Sri Ramakrishna was at the temple garden at Dakshineswar, in his own room. That day I sang two songs. As soon as I had finished the first song,

(Mono Cholo Nijo Niketone:
Let us go back once more, O mind, to our own abode!
Here in this foreign land of earth
Why should we wander aimlessly in stranger's guise?
These living beings round about, and the five elements,
Are strangers to you, all of them; none is your own.
Why do you thus forget yourself,
In love with strangers, O my mind?
Why do you thus forget your own?
Ascend the path of truth, O mind! Unflaggingly climb.
With Love as the lamp to light your way.
As your provision for the journey, bring with you
The virtues, carefully concealed; for, like two highwaymen,
Greed and delusion wait to rob you of your wealth.
And keep beside you constantly.
As guards to shelter you from harm.
Calmness of mind and self-control.
Companionship with holy men will be for you
A welcome rest-house by the road;

There rest your weary limbs awhile, asking your way,
If ever you should be in doubt, of him who watches there.
If anything along the path should frighten you,
Then loudly shout the name of the Lord;
For He is Ruler of that road,
And even Death must bow to Him.)

the Master stood up, took me by the hand, and led me onto the northern verandah. It was winter, so the open spaces between the pillars were covered with screens of matting to keep out the north wind; and this meant that, when the door of the room was closed, anyone standing on the verandah was hidden from both inside and outside. As soon as we were on the verandah, the Master closed the door. I thought he must be going to give me some instruction in private. But what he said and did next was something I could never have believed possible. He suddenly caught hold of my hand and began shedding tears of joy. He said to me, affectionately as if to a familiar friend: "You've come so late! Was that right? Couldn't you have guessed how I've been waiting for you? My ears are nearly burned off, listening to the talk of these worldly people. I thought I would burst, not having anyone to tell how I really felt!" He went on like that — raving and weeping. And then suddenly he folded his palms together and began addressing me as if I were some divine being: **"I know who you are, My Lord. You are Nara, the ancient sage, the incarnation of Narayana. You have come back to earth to take away the sufferings and sorrows of mankind."**

I was absolutely dumbfounded. I said to myself: "What kind of a man is this? He must be raving mad! How can he talk like this to me, who am nobody — the son of Vishwanath Datta?" But I didn't answer him, and I let this wonderful madman go on talking as he chose. Presently he asked me to stay there on the verandah, and he went back into the room and came out again bringing butter, rock candy, and a few pieces of sandesh; and then he began feeding me with his own hands. I kept asking him to give me the sweetmeats, so I could share them with my friends, but he wouldn't. "They'll get some later," he said. "You take these for yourself." And he wouldn't be satisfied until I'd eaten all of them. Then he took my hand and said, "Promise me — you'll come back here soon, alone." I couldn't refuse his request; it was made so earnestly. So I had to say, "I will." Then I went back into the room with him and sat down beside my friends.

I sat and watched him. There was nothing wrong in his words, movements, or behaviour towards others. Rather, from his spiritual words and ecstatic states he seemed to be a man of genuine renunciation.

And there was a marked consistency between his words and life. He used the most simple language, and I thought, "Can this man be a great teacher?" I crept

near him and asked him the question which I had asked so often, **“Sir, have you seen God?” “Yes, I see him just as I see you here, only in a much more intense sense.” “God can be realized,” he went on. “One can see and talk to him as I am seeing and talking to you. But who cares? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for him, he surely manifests himself.”** That impressed me at once. For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. As I heard these things from his lips, I could not but believe that—he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realizations. But I could not reconcile his words with his strange conduct with me. So I concluded that he must be a monomaniac. Yet I could not help acknowledging the magnitude of his renunciation. “He may be a madman,” I thought, “but only the fortunate few can have such renunciation. Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverent homage of mankind!” With such conflicting thoughts I bowed before him and begged leave to return to Calcutta.

Second Visit

I had no idea that the Dakshineswar temple was so far from Calcutta, because I had been there only once before and that was in a carriage. This time, it seemed as if the journey would never end, however far I walked. But, after asking many people the way, I arrived at Dakshineswar at last and went straight to the Master’s room. I found him sitting, deep in his own meditations, on the smaller bed which stands beside the bigger one. There was no one with him. As soon as he saw me, he called me joyfully to him and made me sit down on one end of the bed. He was in a strange mood. He muttered something to himself which I couldn’t understand, looked hard at me, then rose and approached me. I thought we were about to have another crazy scene. Scarcely had that thought passed through my mind before **he placed his right foot on my body. Immediately I had a wonderful experience. My eyes were wide open, and I saw that everything in the room, including the walls themselves, was whirling rapidly around and receding, and at the same time, it seemed to me that my consciousness of self, together with the entire universe, was about to vanish into a vast, all-devouring void. This destruction of my consciousness of self seemed to me to be the same thing as death. I felt that death was right before me, very close. Unable to control myself, I cried out loudly, “Ah, what are you doing to me? Don’t you know I have my parents at home?”**

When the Master heard this, he gave a loud laugh. Then, touching my chest with his hand, he said: “All right — let it stop now. It needn’t be done all at once. It will happen in its own good time.” To my amazement, this extraordinary vision of mine vanished as suddenly as it had come. I returned to my normal state and saw things inside and outside the room standing stationary, as before.

Although it has taken so much time to describe all this, it actually happened in only a few moments. And yet it changed my whole way of thinking. I was bewildered and kept trying to analyze what had happened. I had seen how this experience had begun and ended in obedience to the will of this extraordinary man. I had read about hypnotism in books and I wondered if this was something of the same kind. But my heart refused to believe that it was. For even people of great willpower can only create such conditions when they are working on weak minds. And my mind was by no means weak. Up to then, in fact, I had been proud of my intelligence and willpower. This man did not bewitch me or reduce me to his puppet. On the contrary, when I first met him, I had decided that he was mad. Why then should I have suddenly found myself in this state? It seemed an utter mystery to me. But I determined to be on my guard, lest he should get further influence over me in the future.

The next moment I thought, “How can a man who shatters to pieces a resolute and strong mind like mine be dismissed as a lunatic?” Yet that was just the conclusion at which one would arrive from his effusiveness on our first meeting — unless he were an Incarnation of God, which was indeed a far cry. So I was in a dilemma about the real nature of my experience as well as about the truth of this wonderful man, who was obviously as pure and simple as a child. My rationalistic mind received an unpleasant rebuff at this failure in judging the true state of things. But I was determined to fathom the mystery somehow.

Thoughts like these occupied my mind during the whole of that day. But he became quite another’ man after that incident and, as on the previous occasion, treated me with great kindness and cordiality. His behaviour towards me was like that of a man who meets an old friend or relative after a long separation. He seemed not to be satisfied with entertaining and taking all possible care of me. This remarkably loving treatment drew me all the more to him. At last, finding that the day was coming to a close, I asked leave to go. He seemed very dejected at this and gave me permission only after I had promised to come again at my earliest convenience.

Experience of Cosmic Consciousness

Knowing Naren’s inherent nature, Sri Ramakrishna instructed him in monistic

Vedanta, which teaches that the individual soul and Brahman are identical. One day Naren was telling Hazra about Vedantic nondualism and his unwillingness to accept it. "Can it be," he said, "that the water pot is God, that the drinking vessel is God, that everything we see and all of us are God?" Naren laughed scornfully at the idea and Hazra joined in. While they were laughing, Ramakrishna came up to them. "What are you two talking about?" he asked Naren affectionately; then, without waiting for an answer, he touched Naren and went into samadhi. Naren related the effect of the touch:

At the marvellous touch of the Master, my mind underwent a complete revolution. I was aghast to realize that there really was nothing whatever in the entire universe but God. I remained silent, wondering how long this state of mind would continue. It didn't pass off all day. I got back home, and I felt just the same there; everything I saw was God. I sat down to eat, and I saw that everything — the plate, the food, my mother who was serving it, and I myself — everything was God and nothing else but God. I swallowed a couple of mouthfuls and then sat still without speaking. My mother asked me lovingly: "Why are you so quiet? Why don't you eat?" That brought me back to everyday consciousness, and I began eating again. But, from then on, I kept having the same experience, no matter what I was doing — eating, drinking, sitting; lying down, going to college, strolling along the street. It was a kind of intoxication; I can't describe it. If I was crossing a street and saw a carriage coming towards me I didn't have the urge, as I would ordinarily, to get out of its way for fear of being run over. For I said to myself: "I am that carriage. There's no difference between it and me." During that time, I had no sensation in my hands or my feet. When I ate food, I felt no satisfaction from it; it was as if someone else was eating. Sometimes I would lie down in the middle of a meal, and then get up again after a few minutes and go on eating. Thus it happened that on those days I would eat far more than usual, but this never upset me. My mother became alarmed; she thought I was suffering from some terrible disease. "He won't live long," she'd say.

When that first intoxication lost part of its power, I began to see the world as though it were in a dream. When I went for a walk around Cornwallis Square (the tank Hedua), I used to knock my head against the iron railings to find out if they were only dream-railings or real ones. The loss of feeling in my hands and feet made me afraid that I was going to be paralyzed. When I did at last return to normal consciousness I felt convinced that the state I had been in was a revelation of nondualistic experience. So then I knew that what is written in the scriptures about this experience is all true.

Days of Ecstasy at Dakshineswar

It is impossible to give others any idea of the ineffable joy we derived from the presence of the Master. It is really beyond our understanding how he could train us, without our knowing it, through fun and play, and thus mould our spiritual life. As the master wrestler proceeds with great caution and restraint with the beginner — now overpowering him in the struggle with great difficulty, as it were, and again allowing himself to be defeated to strengthen the pupil's self-confidence — in exactly the same manner did Sri Ramakrishna handle us. Realizing that the Atman (Self), the source of infinite strength, exists in every individual, pigmy though he might be, he was able to see the potential giant in all. He could clearly discern the latent spiritual power which would in the fullness of time manifest itself. Holding up that bright picture to view, he would speak highly of us and encourage us. Again he would warn us lest we should obstruct this future consummation by becoming entangled in worldly desires, and moreover he would keep us under control by carefully observing even the minute details of our life. All this was done silently and unobtrusively. That was the secret of his training of the disciples and of his moulding of their lives.

Once I felt that I could not practise deep concentration during meditation. I told him of it and sought his advice and direction. He told me his personal experiences in the matter and gave me instructions. I remember that as I sat down to meditate during the early hours of the morning, my mind would be disturbed and diverted by the shrill note of the whistle of a neighbouring jute mill. I told him about it, and he advised me to concentrate my mind on the sound of the whistle itself. I followed his advice and derived much benefit from it.

On another occasion I felt difficulty in totally forgetting my body during meditation and concentrating the mind wholly on the ideal. I went to him for counsel, and he gave me the very instruction which he himself had received from Tota Puri (his guru) while practising samadhi according to Vedantic disciplines. He sharply pressed between my eyebrows with his fingernail and said, "Now concentrate your mind on this painful sensation!" I found I could concentrate easily on that sensation as long as I liked, and during that period I completely let go the consciousness of the other parts of my body, not to speak of their causing any distraction hindering my meditation. The solitude of the Panchavati, associated with the various spiritual realizations of the Master, was also the most suitable place for our meditation.

Besides meditation and spiritual exercises, we used to spend a good deal of time there in sheer fun and merrymaking. Sri Ramakrishna also joined in with us, and by taking part, enhanced our innocent pleasure. We used to run and skip

about, climb on the trees, swing from the creepers, and at times hold merry picnics. On the first day that we picnicked the Master noticed that I had cooked the food myself, and he partook of it. I knew that he could not take food unless it was cooked by brahmins, and therefore I had arranged for his meal at the Kali temple. But he said, “It won’t be wrong for me to take food from such a pure soul as you.” In spite of my repeated remonstrations, he enjoyed the food I had cooked that day.

“Ramakrishna Dedicated Me”

Early in 1884, Naren’s father Vishwanath died of a heart attack; he had been ailing for some time. When the time came to look into Vishwanath’s financial affairs, it was found that he had been spending more than he earned and had left nothing but debts. Some relatives even tried to get a share in the family home by means of a lawsuit. They lost the suit, but Naren was still faced by his duty, as the oldest male member of the family, to support his mother and brothers. He had never known adversity of any kind before. He narrated his struggles:

Even before the prescribed period of mourning was over, I was running hither and thither in search of a job. Dizzy from lack of food, I had to go from office to office barefoot in the blazing sun, carrying my application papers. Everywhere I met with a refusal. From that first experience, I learned that unselfish sympathy is very rare in this world; there is no place here for the poor and the weak. Even those who, only a few weeks previously, would have regarded it as a piece of luck if they could do me a favour, now made wry reluctant faces, though they could easily have helped me if they had wished. One day, during that time, when I was walking around in the sun, the soles of my feet became blistered. I was completely exhausted and had to sit down in the shade of the Octerloney Monument on the Maidan. A friend who happened to be with me wanted to console me, so he sang:

Here blows the wind, the breath of Brahman —
It is his grace we feel —

But when I heard that song, I felt as if he were beating me violently on the head. Thinking of the helplessness of my mother and my brothers, I was filled with resentment and despair. “Be quiet!” I told him. “That fanciful nonsense is all right for people living in the lap of luxury — people who have no idea what hunger is — people whose nearest and dearest aren’t going in rags and starving. No doubt it sounds true and beautiful to them — as it did to me, in the old days. But now I’ve seen what life is really like. That song is just a pack of lies.”

I dare say my friend was terribly hurt by my words. How could he understand the grinding poverty which had made me utter them? Some mornings, when I got up, I would find that there wasn't enough food for all of us, so I'd tell my mother, "A friend has invited me to lunch." On such days I had nothing to eat, for I had no money in my pocket. I was too proud to say anything about this to anyone outside my family. Sometimes rich men would invite me into their houses to sing and play at their parties, and I went, just as I had always done. Most of them never concerned themselves about how I was getting along. A very few used to ask, "Why do you look so pale and sad today?" But only one of them ever found out — and that wasn't through me — how things really were. He used to send money to my mother from time to time, anonymously. I am under an eternal debt to him.

In spite of all these trials and tribulations, I did not lose my faith in the existence of God, nor did I doubt that "God is good." I used to wake up from sleep in the morning, remember the Lord, and leave my bed taking his name. Then with firm determination and hope I went from place to place in search of some means of earning money. I was leaving my bed as usual, calling on the Lord, when one day my mother heard my words from the adjacent room and said bitterly: "Stop, lad. You have been constantly repeating the name of the Lord since your childhood — and what has he done for you?" The words hurt me terribly. Cut to the quick, I pondered: "Does God actually exist? If so, does he hear the plaintive prayer of man? Why then is there no response to my many prayers to him? Whence is so much evil in the creation of a benign Creator? Why is there so much calamity in the kingdom of one who is all Bliss?" ... My heart was pierced through by a feeling of wounded love, and doubt in the existence of God assailed me.

It was against my nature to do anything and conceal it from others. Even as a child, I had never been able to conceal my least thought or action, either from fear or any other motive. So it wasn't surprising that I now began to tell people aggressively that God did not exist; and that, even if he did exist, it was no use calling on him because it produced no results. Of course, the rumour soon spread around that I had become an atheist, and furthermore that I was mixing with people of bad character and visiting houses of ill repute.

Such news travels fast. It didn't take long for these words of mine, in a completely distorted version, to reach the ears of the Master, not to mention those of his devotees in Calcutta. Some of them came to visit me, to find out the truth, and they made it obvious that they believed at least part of what they had heard, if not all. I was bitterly wounded to realize that they could think so little of me. I told them that it was cowardice to believe in God merely from fear of

hell. Quoting Hume, Mill, Bain, Comte, and other Western philosophers. I argued fiercely that there is no evidence of the existence of God. And so they went away, more than ever convinced, as I afterwards learned, of my downfall. In my defiant mood, this actually made me happy. Then the thought came to me that perhaps the Master now believed the same thing. As soon as I thought that, I felt terrible pain. But I said to myself, "Let him believe it, then. If he does, I can't help it. People's good or bad opinions are worth nothing anyhow." Later, I discovered that the Master *had* heard all of these lies about me. At first he had made no comment. Then, when one of the devotees wept and said, "Sir, we never dreamed Naren would sink so low!" the Master cried out excitedly, "Silence, you scoundrels! Mother has told me that he could never do such things. If you talk about this anymore, I won't have you in the room!"

I now became absolutely indifferent to the praise or blame of the world. I was firmly convinced that I wasn't born to earn money, support a family, or seek worldly enjoyments. Secretly, I was preparing to renounce the world, as my grandfather had done. The day arrived on which I had decided to start life as a wandering monk — and then I heard that, on that very day, the Master was coming to the house of a devotee in Calcutta. I thought this was very fortunate: I should see my guru before I left home forever. But, as soon as I met the Master, he told me imperiously, "You must come with me to Dakshinewar today." I offered various excuses, but he wouldn't take no for an answer. I had to ride back with him. In the carriage we didn't speak much. When we got to Dakshineswar I sat in his room for some time. Others were present. Then the Master went into a state of ecstasy. He came over to me suddenly, took my hand in his, and sang, with tears pouring down his face:

We are afraid to speak, and yet we are afraid to keep still;
Our minds, O Radha, half believe that we are about to lose you!

All this time I had fought back the strong emotion I was feeling. Now I couldn't do so any longer, and my tears poured down like his. I felt sure that the Master knew all about my plans. The others were astonished to see us behave in this way. After the Master had returned to normal consciousness, one of them asked him what was the matter. He smiled and answered, "It's just something between the two of us." That night he sent the others away and called me to him and said: "I know you have come to the world to do Mother's work. You can never lead a worldly life. But, for my sake, stay with your family as long as I'm alive."

I bade good-bye to the Master and returned home the next day. And immediately a hundred thoughts about the family occupied my mind. I began

going from place to place now as before and made various kinds of efforts. I worked in the office of an attorney and translated a few books, as a result of which I earned a little money and the household was managed somehow. But these were all temporary jobs, and in the absence of any permanent work no smooth arrangement for the maintenance of my mother and brothers could be made. I remembered a little later: “God grants the Master’s prayers. I shall make him pray for me so that the suffering of my mother and brothers for want of food and clothing might be removed. He will never refuse to do so for my sake.”

I hurried to Dakshineswar and persistently asked him to pray to Mother that the pecuniary difficulty of my mother and brothers might be removed. The Master said to me affectionately: “My child, I cannot say such words, you know. Why don’t you yourself pray? You don’t accept Mother. That is why you suffer so much.” I replied: “I have no knowledge of Mother. Please pray to Mother yourself for my sake. You must pray. I will not leave you unless you do so.” The Master said with affection: “I prayed to Mother many times indeed to remove your sufferings. But as you do not accept Mother, she does not grant the prayer. Well, today is Tuesday, a day especially sacred to Mother. Mother will, I say, grant you whatever you ask for. Go to the temple tonight, bow down to her, and pray for a boon. My affectionate Mother is the Power of Brahman. She is pure Consciousness embodied. She has given birth to the universe according to her will. What can she not do, if she wills?”

A firm faith arose in my mind that all the sufferings would certainly come to an end as soon as I prayed to Mother, inasmuch as the Master had said so. I waited for the night in great expectancy. The night arrived at last. Three hours of the night had elapsed when the Master asked me to go to the holy temple. As I was going, a sort of profound inebriation possessed me. I was reeling. A firm conviction gripped me that I would actually see Mother and hear her words. I forgot everything else and became completely merged in that thought alone. Coming into the temple, I saw that Mother was actually pure Consciousness, was actually living, and was really the fountainhead of infinite love and beauty. My heart swelled with loving devotion, and, beside myself with bliss, I made repeated salutations to her, praying: “Mother, grant me discrimination, grant me detachment, grant me divine knowledge and devotion. Ordain that I may always have an unobstructed vision of you.” My heart was flooded with peace. The whole universe completely disappeared and Mother alone remained filling my heart.

No sooner had I returned to the Master than he asked, “Did you pray to Mother for the removal of your worldly wants?” Startled at his question, I said: “No, sir, I forgot to do so. So what should I do now?” He said, “Go quickly

again and pray to her." I started for the temple once more, and coming to Mother's presence, became inebriated again. I forgot everything, bowed down to her repeatedly, and prayed for divine knowledge and devotion before I came back. The Master smiled and said, "Well, did you tell her this time?" I was startled again and said: "No, sir. Hardly had I seen Mother when I forgot everything on account of the influence of an indescribable Divine Power and prayed for knowledge and devotion only. What's to be done now?" The Master said: "Silly boy, could you not control yourself a little and make that prayer? Go once more, if you can, and tell her those words. Quick!"

I started a third time, but as soon as I entered the temple a formidable sense of shame occupied my heart. I thought what a trifling thing have I come to ask of Mother! It is, as the Master says, just like the folly of asking a king, having received his grace, for gourds and pumpkins. Ah! How low is my intellect! Overpowered with shame and aversion I bowed down to her over and over again, saying: **"I don't want anything else, Mother. Do grant me divine knowledge and devotion only."** When I came out from the temple, it occurred to me that it was certainly the play of the Master. Otherwise, how was it that I could not speak the words though I came to pray to her as many as three times? Afterwards I insisted that he ensure my mother's and brothers' freedom from lack of food and clothing, saying, "It is certainly you who made me intoxicated that way." He said affectionately to me: "My child, I can never offer such a prayer for anyone. It does not indeed come out of my mouth. You would, I told you, get from Mother whatever you wanted. But you could not ask her for it. You are not meant for worldly happiness. What can I do?" I said: "That won't do, Sir. You must utter the prayer for my sake. It is my firm conviction that they will be free from all sufferings if you only say so." As I kept on persisting, he said,**"** All right — they will never lack plain food and clothing."

Ramakrishna dedicated me to her (Divine Mother). And I believe that she guides me in every little thing I do and just does what she likes with me. Yet I fought so long. I loved the man (Sri Ramakrishna), and that held me. I thought him the purest man I had ever seen, and I know that he loved me as my own father and mother had not the power to do.

Experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi

One day in the Cossipore garden, I expressed my prayer (for nirvikalpa samadhi) to Sri Ramakrishna with great earnestness. Then in the evening, at the hour of meditation, I lost consciousness of the body and felt that it was absolutely nonexistent. I felt that the sun, moon, space, time, ether, and all had

been reduced to a homogeneous mass and then melted far away into the unknown. Body-consciousness almost vanished, and I nearly merged in the Supreme. But I had just a trace of the feeling of ego so I could again return to the world of relativity from samadhi. In this state of samadhi all difference between "I" and "Brahman" goes away, everything is reduced to unity, like the water of the Infinite Ocean — water everywhere, nothing else exists. Language and thought; all fail there. Then only is the state "beyond mind and speech" realized in its actuality. Otherwise, as long as the religious aspirant thinks or says, "I am Brahman" — "I" and "Brahman," these two entities persist — there is the involved semblance of duality. After that experience, even after trying repeatedly, I failed to bring back the state of samadhi. On informing Sri Ramakrishna about it, he said: "If you remain day and night in that state, the work of the Divine Mother will not be accomplished. Therefore you won't be able to induce that state again. When your work is finished, .it will come again."

Sri Ramakrishna Transmitted Power

Two or three days before Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, she whom he used to call "Kali" entered this body. It is she who takes me here and there and makes me work, without letting me remain quiet or allowing me to look to my personal comforts.

Before his leaving the body, he called me to his side one day, and asking me to sit before him, looked steadily at me and went into samadhi. Then I felt that a subtle force like an electric shock was entering my body! In a little while I also lost outward consciousness and sat motionless. How long I stayed in that condition I do not remember. When consciousness returned I found Sri Ramakrishna shedding tears. On questioning him, he answered me affectionately: "Today, giving you my all, I have become a beggar. With this power you are to do much work for the good of the world before you return." I feel that that power is constantly directing me to this or that work. This body has not been made for remaining idle.

Sri Ramakrishna Revealed Himself

One day while Sri Ramakrishna was staying at the Cossipore garden, his body in imminent danger of falling off forever, I was sitting by the side of his bed and saying in my mind, "Well, now if you can declare that you are God, then only will I believe you are really God himself." It was only two days before he passed away. Immediately he looked up towards me and said, **"He who was Rama, he who was Krishna, verily is he now Ramakrishna in this body, and not in**

your Vedantic sense.".

(*A few words may be said here about the meaning of the Incarnation in the Hindu religious tradition. One of the main doctrines of Vedanta is the divinity of the soul: every soul, in reality, is Brahman. Thus it may be presumed that there is no difference between an Incarnation and an ordinary man. To be sure, from the standpoint of the Absolute, or Brahman, no such difference exists. But from the relative standpoint, where multiplicity is perceived, a difference must be admitted. Embodied human beings reflect godliness in varying measure. In an Incarnation this godliness is fully manifest. Therefore an Incarnation is unlike an ordinary mortal or even an illumined saint.*

To give an illustration: There is no difference between a clay lion and a clay mouse, from the standpoint of the clay. Both become the same substance when dissolved into clay. But the difference between the lion and the mouse, from the standpoint of form, is clearly seen. Likewise, as Brahman, an ordinary man is identical with an Incarnation. Both become the same Brahman when they attain final illumination. But in the relative state of name and form, which is admitted by .Vedanta, the difference between them is accepted. According to the Bhagavad Gita (IV. 6-8), Brahman in times of spiritual crisis assumes a human body through Its own inscrutable power, called maya. Though birthless, immutable, and the Lord of all beings, yet in every age Brahman appears to be incarnated in a human body for the protection of the good and the punishment of the wicked.)

At this I was struck dumb.

SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

(From: A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda by Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society, St. Louis, 1988)

Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) met Sri Ramakrishna in the middle of 1881 and lived with him almost constantly until the Master's passing away. The Master had a vision about him prior to their first meeting, and as soon as he saw Brahmananda, recognized him as his spiritual son. The swami later became the first president of the Ramakrishna Order.

Living with Sri Ramakrishna

Some devotees would tell Sri Ramakrishna about their spiritual experiences. Hearing them, one young disciple asked the Master to grant him some spiritual experiences. The Master told him: "Look. That kind of experience comes when one practises meditation and prayer regularly and systematically. Wait. You will get it eventually."

A couple of days later, in the evening, the young disciple saw the Master walking towards the Divine Mother's temple, and he followed him. Sri Ramakrishna entered the temple, but the disciple did not dare go inside, so he sat in the natmandir (the hall in front of the Mother's temple) and began to meditate. After a while he suddenly saw a brilliant light, like that of a million suns, rushing towards him from the shrine of the Divine Mother. He was frightened and ran to the Master's room.

A little later Sri Ramakrishna returned from the shrine. Seeing the young disciple in his room, he said: “Hello! Did you sit for meditation this evening?” “Yes, I did,” answered the young disciple, and he related to the Master what had happened. Then the Master told him: “You complain that you don’t experience anything. You ask, ‘What is the use of practising meditation?’ So why did you run away when you had an experience?”

It is natural to experience depression now and then. I also felt like that once while I was in Dakshineswar. I was then quite young and the Master was about fifty years old, so I was shy about speaking openly with him. One day I was meditating in the Kali temple. I could not concentrate my mind. This made me very sad. I said to myself: “I have been living here so long, yet I have not achieved anything. What is the use of staying here then? Forget it! I am not going to say anything about it to the Master. If this depressed condition continues another two or three days, I shall return home. There my mind will be occupied with different things.” Having decided this in the shrine, I returned to the Master’s room. The Master was then walking on the verandah. Seeing me, he also entered the room. It was customary after returning from the shrine to salute the Master and then eat a light breakfast. As soon as I saluted the Master, he said, “Look. When you returned from the shrine, I saw that your mind seemed to be covered with a thick net.” I realized that he knew everything, so I said, “Sir, you know the bad condition of my mind.” He then wrote something on my tongue. Immediately I forgot all my painful depression and was overwhelmed with an inexpressible joy.

As long as I lived with him I had spontaneous recollection and contemplation of God. An ecstatic joy filled me all the time. That is why one requires a powerful guru — one who has realized God. Before initiation the guru and the disciple should test each other for a long time. Otherwise there may be regrets afterwards. This is no passing relationship.

Ah, how joyfully we lived with the Master at Dakshineswar! Sometimes we would be convulsed with side-splitting laughter by his humour and wit. What we now cannot experience by meditation, we then attained automatically. If my mind went astray even a little, he would understand it from my appearance and would pass his hand over my chest, setting my mind right. And how free I was with him! One day, on the semicircular west porch, I was rubbing oil on his body. For some reason I got angry with him. I threw away the bottle of oil and strode off with the intention of never returning. I got as far as Jadu Mallik’s garden house but could not move further. I sat down. In the meantime he had sent Ramlal to call me back. When I returned he said: “Look. Could you go? I drew a boundary line there.”

On another occasion I did something wrong and became extremely penitent. I went to confess it to him. As soon as I arrived he asked me to follow him with his water jug. While returning he said: “You did this certain thing yesterday. Never do it again.” I was surprised. I wondered how he had known.

Another day when I returned from Calcutta he said: “Why can’t I look at you? Have you done anything wrong?” “No,” I replied, because I understood “wrong action” to mean stealing, robbery, adultery, and so on. The Master again asked me, “Did you tell any lie?” Then I remembered that the day before, while chatting and joking, I had told an untruth.

There is nothing outside. Everything is inside. People are fond of music, but they do not realize that the music we hear with our ears is trivial compared to the music within. How sweet and soothing it is! During his meditation in the Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna used to listen to the melody of the vina [a stringed instrument] within.

Once I was meditating in the Panchavati at noon while the Master was talking about the manifestation of Brahman as sound *(Shabda-Brahman)*. Listening to that discussion, even the birds in the Panchavati began to sing Vedic songs and I heard them.

The Master’s Spiritual States

Holy company is necessary. When one sees and hears holy people, spiritual feelings arise in the mind and doubts go away. One imbibes deeper impressions by observing a pure, God-intoxicated life than by reading hundreds of books. Adhar Sen [a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna] used to visit the Master quite often accompanied by a school subinspec-tor, who sometimes experienced ecstasy. One day when they arrived at Dakshineswar the Master was in samadhi. There was such a smile on his face, as if it could not contain so much joy. Then Adhar said to his friend: “Seeing your trance, I conceived a disgust for it. It seemed to suggest great suffering within you. Can divine ecstasy ever cause pain? The blissful ecstasy of the Master has opened my eyes. I would have found it impossible to come here anymore if his ecstasy had been like yours.” Doubt would have remained in Adhar’s mind had he not gone to the Master and seen his samadhi. This is the result of holy company.

Usually Sri Ramakrishna never slept for more than an hour or so at night. He would pass the night sometimes in samadhi, sometimes singing devotional songs, and sometimes chanting the Lord’s name. I often saw him in samadhi for an hour or more. In that state he could not talk in spite of repeated efforts. Regaining outer consciousness, he would say: “Look. When I am in samadhi I

want to tell you my experiences, but at that time I lose my power of speech." After samadhi, he used to mutter something. It seemed to me that he was talking with somebody. I heard that in earlier years the Master stayed in samadhi most of the time.

The Master would go into different kinds of samadhi at different times. Sometimes his whole body would become stiff like a log. Coming down from this state, he could easily regain normal consciousness. At other times, however, when he was absorbed in deep samadhi, it would take a longer period for him to return to consciousness of the outer world. On such occasions he would take a deep breath after gasping for a while, like a drowning man coming up out of water. Even after he had composed himself, he would talk like a drunkard for some time, and not all of his speech was intelligible. At that time he would often express some small desire: "I shall eat sukta (a bitter squash curry)," "I shall smoke tobacco," and so on. And sometimes he would rub his face, moving his hands up and down.

Swami Brahmananda then raised a question himself and continued the conversation.

Can you tell me why the Master made rapid spiritual progress without having any particular external help? It is hard to discern any cause other than a few inborn *samskaras* (tendencies). Is it not a miracle? There are many more wonders in his life. Once a monk gave the Master a metal image of Ramlala (the child Rama). When the Master carried that image to the Ganga for a bath, it would swim in the river. The Master himself told us this. Under such circumstances how does one differentiate between matter and consciousness?

The Master said that in the beginning he did not feel any strong desire to renounce the world, but a spiritual tempest blew over him which changed his whole life.

Before the Master passed away at the Cossipore garden house, he would tell us about his visions of the Infinite. One day Girish and Swamis Vivekananda, Ramakrishnananda, Niranjanananda, and I were present in his room. We were then young boys, but Girish was elderly and extremely intelligent. Hearing a few words about the Infinite from the Master, Girish exclaimed: "Sir, don't talk anymore. I get dizzy." Oh, what a conversation! The Master used to say: "Shukadeva is like an ant that is satisfied with a small particle of sugar. Rama, Krishna, and other Incarnations are like bunches of grapes hanging on the tree of Satchidananda." These are mere thoughts about the Infinite. It is hard to comprehend.

On one occasion Sri Ramakrishna said: “One day as I was meditating in the Kali temple, I saw in a vision the veils of maya disappearing one after another. In another vision the Divine Mother showed me the light of Brahman, which surpassed the light of even millions of suns together. I then saw that a luminous form emerged from that infinite light and again merged back into its source. I experienced that the formless Brahman took a form and again became formless.”

Oh, what superhuman power the Master had! At that time we thought it was merely a peculiar power with him, but we could not understand the nature of it. Now we realize what a wonderful power it was! One day I said to him: “Sir, I cannot get rid of lust. What shall I do?”

He touched me in the region of the heart, muttering some indistinct words. All lust vanished from me forever! I have never felt its existence since then. Do you see the wonder of it?

I never saw him manifest any powers such as *anima* (the power to assume minute forms) or others, but he had a very clear insight into human character. I witnessed a number of supernatural things in his life.

The Master’s Spiritual Instructions

It would have been wonderful if the Master’s sayings, especially those about his devotional practices, spiritual unfoldment, and experiences, could have been recorded exactly and correctly — that is to say, immediately after hearing them from him. When he talked about knowledge (jnana), he did not talk about anything else. Again, when he talked about devotion (bhakti), he spoke of nothing but devotion. He repeatedly imprinted in our minds that worldly knowledge is insignificant and futile, that one must exert oneself to attain spiritual knowledge, devotion, and love alone.

The Master could seldom sleep at night. He did not allow the boys who lived with him to sleep either. When others had gone to bed he would wake up his disciples, saying: “What is this? Have you come here to sleep?” Then he would instruct each disciple and send him for meditation to the Panchavati, Kali temple, or Shiva temple, according to his inclination. After practising japam and meditation as directed, each would return to the room and sleep. Thus the Master made his disciples work hard. Often he would say: “Three classes of people stay awake at night: the yogi, the enjoyer, and the sick person. You are all yogis, so sleeping at night is not meant for you.”

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “Eat as much as you like during the day but eat sparingly at night.” The idea is that the full meal taken at noon will be easily digested, and if you eat lightly at night, your body will remain light and you can

easily concentrate the mind. A heavy meal at night produces laziness and sleep.

Sri Ramakrishna used to encourage everybody to practise meditation. A person falls from spiritual life if he does not practise meditation regularly. The Master asked his guru Tota Puri, “You have attained perfection, so why do you still practise meditation?” Pointing to his shining brass pot, Tota Puri replied, “If you do not clean brass every day, it will be covered with stains.” The Master used to say: “The sign of true meditation is that one “forgets one’s surroundings and body. One will not feel even a crow sitting on one’s head.” Sri Ramakrishna attained that state. Once while he was meditating in the natmandir, a crow sat on his head.

The temple garden of Dakshineswar, which Rani Rashmani had built, provided everything Sri Ramakrishna needed for practising sadhana. If you have true faith, love, and devotion, God will provide everything you need.

A monk saved ten thousand rupees in a bank. Hearing this, the Master said, “He who calculates pros and cons and plans for the future will ruin his spiritual life.”

Usually the Master would not allow anyone to stay with him for more than two or three days, but once a young man stayed with him for several days. This annoyed some devotees, and they complained to the Master that he was teaching the young man the path of renunciation. The Master answered: “Let him take up a worldly life. Am I dissuading him from it? Let him first attain knowledge and then enter the world. Do I teach everybody to renounce lust and gold? I talk about renunciation to the ones who need only a little encouragement.” He used to say to the rest, “Go and enjoy hog-plum pickle, and come here for medicine when you have colic.”

Sometimes the Master would ask people: “Can you tell me what kind of state I am passing through? What makes me go so often to those who cannot buy me a penny’s worth of puffed sugar cakes and who have not even the means to offer me a torn mat to sit on?” He used to explain afterwards: “I find that certain people will easily attain success. It will be very difficult for the rest, for they are, as it were, pots for curd. One cannot keep milk in them.” He would tell them, “I pray for you so that you may realize God quickly.”

One day when the topic of the Kartabhajas *(a minor sect of Vaishnavas)* came up in the course of conversation, Girish Ghosh (a devotee of the Master) sarcastically remarked that he would write a drama about them. Hearing this, the Master gravely said: “You see, some people in that sect also have attained perfection. It too is a path.”

One day Swami Turiyananda asked the Master, “How can I get rid of lust?” The Master replied: “Why should it be gotten rid of? Turn it in another

direction.” He said the same thing about anger, greed, infatuation, and other passions. These words of the Master inspired the young disciple.

The Master used to say, “Wherever there is extreme longing, God reveals himself more.” He also said to some people, while pointing to himself: “Have love for this. That will do.” Oh! Such a wonderful play is over!

Again, he used to say, “One needs intense longing to realize God.” In this connection the Master often told a story: Once an aspirant asked his teacher how to realize God. The teacher, without answering, took the disciple to the nearest pond and held him under the water. After a while, when the student was extremely restless and about to collapse, the teacher pulled him out of the water and asked, “How did you feel under the water?” “I was dying for a breath of air,” he answered. “When you feel like that for God,” said the teacher, “you will realize him.”

Another time he said: “Do you know what type of love is necessary for God-realization? As a dog with a wound in its head becomes frantic and jumps around, so one should desperately seek God.”

The Master used to say that there should not be any theft (i.e., hypocrisy) in the inner chamber of the heart. He had great affection for the simple-hearted. He used to say: “I don’t care for flattery. I love the person who calls on God sincerely.” The Master also said that all impurities of the mind disappear by calling on God with a sincere heart.

SWAMI ADBHUTANANDA

(From: Swami Adbhutananda: Teachings and Reminiscences, by Swami Chetanananda (Vedanta Society, St. Louis 1980)

Swami Adbhutananda (?-1920), or Latu Maharaj, was an uneducated, unsophisticated shepherd boy. From the time he joined the Master at Dakshineswar until the Master’s death, Latu was almost constantly in attendance on him. Latu’s reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna therefore have a special value in their wealth of detail and insight.

It was 11 March 1883, Sri Ramakrishna’s birthday. The Master asked me to bring him some water from the Ganga for his bath. He took his bath with one pitcher of water and afterwards went to the Kali temple. Some of us had to work in the kitchen. Between one hundred and one hundred and fifty people had their meal at Dakshineswar on that occasion, and whatever was left from the meal was distributed to the poor. Manomohan Babu brought a kirtan party from Konnagar,

and the Master sang with them. Later he asked us to join him in the Panchavati. The Master told us that day that he was not only a sannyasin, but king among the sannyasins.

Once while staying at Dakshineswar, Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) became sick. The Master told him: “Take this prasad of Lord Jagannath. Then you will be all right.” Such is the effect of the prasad of Jagannath! You people don’t believe that. The Master used to say, “Before you take your food, eat one or two particles of Jagannath prasad.”

On Dashahara day (a special celebration in honour of the Ganga) the Master asked us to offer worship to the Mother Ganga. He told Rakhal, “Mother Ganga is a living goddess, and today one should worship her.” At that time Rakhal did not regard the Ganga as a goddess, and as the Master knew this, he told him: “One day while I was walking near the embankment of the’Ganga, I had a doubt: Is Mother Ganga truly a goddess? At that moment I heard the distinct sound of a conch coming from the middle of the river. Gradually the sound came nearer, and I saw a boy travelling across the water, blowing a conch, and a goddess was following him. That vision dispelled all my doubts.” (*This vision of Sri Ramakrishna’s corroborates the mythological story of how Bhagirath brought the Ganga from heaven to earth in order to save his departed ancestors)* Rakhal was amazed to hear this and said: “We don’t know about such things. We only know the Ganga as a river of water, befouled by the boatmen.” The Master replied sharply: “Take care! Don’t you befoul the Mother Ganga!” From that day on Rakhal had great respect for the Ganga.

That was also the first year (1883) that I attended the festival at Panihati with the Master. Rakhal, Bhavanath, and others went in Ram Babu’s carriage. Many other devotees of the Master also attended. Navadwip Goswami was there, and the Master suddenly began to sing with him. All of us were startled to see the Master go into *bhava samadhi.* His breathing stopped; his face, eyes, even the palms of his hands, reddened. Seeing him in this ecstatic mood, many people rushed to take the dust of his feet. We were in a dilemma. Everybody wanted to touch the Master, and though we forbade them, they ignored us. So there was an uproar.

Ram Babu said to me: “Leto, don’t try to stop them. Let the people touch him and be blessed.” But I didn’t obey him, for I knew that if just anybody touched the Master while he was in samadhi, he would experience terrible pain.

At last, three of us — Rakhal, Bhavanath, and I — escorted him from the grounds to the parlour. But how difficult it was to resist those devotees! Even as we headed for the parlour, people continued to touch his feet. Then do you know what Ram Babu did? He took a handful of dust from the ground and touched it

to the Master's feet and then started to distribute it among the people. Thus the Master was released from the crowd.

The following year *(actually this visit was in 1885)* I also went to Panihati with him. This time we went by boat. Someone asked Holy Mother (Sri Sarada Devi) to accompany us, but she refused. The Master praised her for this: "See her wisdom. She refused to go with us so that no one would make critical comments about us." That year the Master took prasad with all and danced in ecstasy with both hands raised.

At this same festival the Master was offered five rupees — other holy men received only one or two rupees. The Master would not accept the money. The manager of the festival insisted, however, and secretly gave the money to Rakhal. With the money Rakhal bought a basket of mangoes and a package of sweets for the Master. When the Master came to know of it, he was angry with Rakhal and warned him: "Never do anything like that again. Your acceptance means my acceptance. A monk must be like the birds and not lay things up for the future."

About two months before Durga Puja we accompanied the Master to Jadu Mallik's house at Pathuriaghata. Although I had seen Jadu Mallik before in his garden house (adjacent to the Dakshineswar temple), I had never been to his home. The Master came to see the new image of the goddess Simhavahini, who was the presiding deity at Jadu Mallik's house. After visiting the shrine, the Master asked about Jadu Babu.

Jadu Babu was lying on a marble bench. He greeted the Master: "Welcome, welcome, young priest. You don't come this way very often anymore. But since Mother is here now, you have remembered us."

In reply the Master said: "What type of man are you? Mother has come here and you didn't let me know!"

"Young priest, I have never met a man so well informed about the Mother as you," replied Jadu Babu. "She arrived just yesterday, and you have come already. When have I had the time to send the news to you?"

"All right," said the Master, smiling. "Now please ask for some of the Mother's prasad to be brought. It would not be auspicious if we returned home without having taken anything." Still lying on the bench, Jadu Babu ordered someone to bring some prasad, and that was done instantly. When the Master was ready to leave, Jadu Babu said, "Won't you say hello to my own mother?"

So the Master shouted: "Hello, Jadu's mother! Will you give me a glass of water?" Jadu's mother came downstairs with a glass. The Master took it and sipped from it once.

When the Master returned to the carriage, the devotees said: "Sir, please don't

go to such a rich man's house again. Why should you visit him? He did not even ask you to be seated. Why should you be subjected to such insults?"

The Master answered: "These are worldly people, and they are always desiring worldly things. Yet in between their worldly thoughts they worship the Mother. You don't even do that much. Why should your heads ache over whether he did or didn't ask me to sit down? You came to visit the Mother, and as a bonus you received prasad. Isn't that enough for you? Who else would have given you prasad at such an unusual hour? Did you come only to visit Jadu and to be offended because he did not ask you to be seated?"

The devotees who had spoken against Jadu Babu became silent. Thus the Master would test us. "If you want to be a sadhu," he would say, "give up the idea of self-importance. Pay no attention to whether you are respected or not."

One day the Master told Jadu Babu: "You have saved so much for this world. What have you acquired for the next?"

Jadu Babu replied: "Young priest, you are the one who will take care of the other world for me. You will save me at the moment of death, and I am waiting until then. If you don't grant me liberation, your name 'deliverer of the fallen will be marred, so you cannot forget me at my death."

You see, although Jadu Mallik had plenty of money, he couldn't give up the desire for more. Another time the Master told him, "Jadu, you have saved so much money, yet still you want more."

Jadu Babu replied: "That desire will not go. You cannot give up the desire for God. In the same way, we worldly people cannot give up our desire for money. Why should I renounce money? You renounce all the things of the world and yearn for God, while I am a beggar asking for more and more of his riches. Doesn't worldly wealth also belong to him?"

The Master was very pleased to hear this line of argument. "If you maintain this attitude, you have no need to worry. But tell me, Jadu, are you saying this sincerely?"

Then Jadu Babu replied, "Young priest, you know that I cannot hide anything from you."

On another occasion the Master said to Jadu Babu: "You used to chant the name of God, but now you do not think of him. Why is this?"

Jadu Babu said: "Since I have known you, I don't feel the need to call on God. And I have found that if I chant the name of the Lord, my mind cannot concentrate on worldly affairs. So I neglect the Lord in order to look after my fortune."

"Don't go so far, Jadu," said the Master. "Why must you be like an ox yoked

to a grinding mill?”

“That is the result of my past actions,” said Jadu Babu.

The Master taught me a great deal. Sometimes he would purposely send me to Loren (a rustic pronunciation of Naren), so that I would hear about many things from him. Often the Master would arrange a debate between Girish Babu (Girish Ghosh) and Loren, but Loren was powerful and not afraid to challenge anyone. He would argue a lot, and I would report it all to the Master. Now and then the Master would test me. Once he asked, “Naren said all this and you kept quiet?”

“What do I know?” was my answer. “How can I compete with Loren?”

The Master said: “You have heard so many things here *(meaning himself)* and you said nothing? You should have told him that if God did not create this world, then who did?”

“Loren says that this creation is a natural process” I replied.

“Is it possible for nature to create?” the Master said. “If there is an effect, there must be a cause that preceded it. There is a powerful Being behind this creation.”

Did you know that the Master snatched me from the snares of the world? I was an orphan. He flooded me with love and affection. If he had not accepted me, I would have been like an animal, spending all my days working like a slave. My life would have been worth nothing. I am an unlettered man. He used to tell me: “Always keep your mind spotless. Don’t allow impure thoughts to enter it. If you find such desires tormenting you, pray to God and chant his name. He will protect you. If the mind still will not remain calm, then go to the temple of the Mother and sit before her. Or else come here *(pointing to himself).”*

Once a devotee at Dakshineswar was behaving badly, and I found it impossible to check my irritation. I scolded him and he felt very hurt. The Master knew how the devotee had suffered, and when the devotee had gone he said to me: “It is not good to speak harshly to those who come here. They are tormented with worldly problems. If they come here and then are scolded for their shortcomings, where will they go? In the presence of holy company never use harsh words to anyone, and never say anything to cause pain to another.”

Do you know what he told me next? “Tomorrow, visit this man and speak to him in such a way that he will forget what you said to him today.” So the next day I visited him. My pride was humbled. I spoke to him very sweetly. When I returned, however, the Master asked, “Did you offer him salutations from me?”

Amazed at his words, I said that I had not. Then he said, “Go to him again and offer him my salutations.”

So again I went to that man and conveyed the Master's salutations. At this the devotee burst into tears. I was moved to see him weeping. When I returned this time the Master said, "Now your misdeed is pardoned."

One day Girish Ghosh saluted the Master by raising his folded hands to his forehead. The Master immediately returned the salutation by bowing from the waist. Girish saluted the Master again. The Master saluted Girish Babu with an even deeper bow. At last, when Girish Babu prostrated flat on the ground before him, the Master blessed him. Later Girish Babu would say: "This time the Lord has come to conquer the world through prostrations. In his incarnation as Krishna it was the flute; as Chaitanya, the Name. But the weapon of his powerful Incarnation this time is the salutation." The Master used to say: "Learn to be humble. The ego will be thus removed."

One day Hazra said to the Master: "Gadadhar *(Actual name of Sri Ramakrishna),* you are not proceeding along the right lines. If you continue like this, people won't respect you for long. At least show them a little something! Why not count beads as I do?"

This made the Master laugh. He called Harish, Gopal, and Rakhal and said to them: "Do you know what advice Hazra is giving me? He is telling me to start counting beads. But you see, I can't do those things now. Still, he says that people won't respect me if I don't tell beads. Is this true?"

"Pay no attention to his words," said Harish. "He is just a fool."

"Don't say that," said the Master. "The Divine Mother is speaking through him."

Harish was surprised. "What? The Divine Mother speaking through Hazra?"

"Yes," answered the Master. "Mother conveys her messages like this."

Nevertheless, Hazra's mind was a bit twisted. While practising japam he would meditate on worldly things, so he didn't make any progress. But he escaped the snares of the world by holding onto Loren. It was due to Loren's insistence that the Master blessed Hazra. After the Master passed away, Hazra began to think of himself as an avatar—even greater than the Master.

One day Hazra had a desire to massage the Master's feet, but the Master wouldn't let him. Hazra felt hurt. He left the room and sat outside and was very morose. At last the Master called him back, and that day only he served the Master.

On another occasion Hazra wanted to lecture to those who came to the temple. When they arrived to see the Master, he told them: "Today Sri Ramakrishna is not here. What will you gain by merely sitting in his room? Come and listen to what I have to say." But nobody went to him.

Loren was Hazra's bosom friend. He would prepare tobacco for Loren and

have long discussions with him. Loren used to tease him: “Really, you are a wonderful *siddha-purusha* (perfect soul). At last I have found a rare soul who is constantly telling his beads. Your rosary is very nice—such big, bright beads. There is none like you.”

Then Hazra would swell with pride and tell us: “You people cannot understand me—not even Sri Ramakrishna. Only Naren knows me.” Just see his pride. Man falls in this way. He used to chant, “Soham, soham (I am Brahman).” The Master would tell us: “Don’t associate with Hazra. Yours is the path of devotion. What will you do with that dry knowledge?”

When I first saw Balaram Babu, I did not recognize him to be a Bengali. He wore a turban and carried a staff, and he wore a long robe with another cloth over that. He also had a long beard. Now and then we went to his house. The Master used to say, “Balaram’s house is my Calcutta fort, my parlour.”

Balaram Babu arranged for the daily worship of Lord Jagannath in his home. The Master said that the food there was very pure. I have heard that the Master visited his home a hundred times and that Balaram Babu maintained a record of these visits. Balaram Babu also visited Dak shineswar very often. The Master once saw him in a vision as a member of a kirtan party led by Sri Chaitanya.

Balaram Babu would escort the Master to the inner apartments (the women’s quarters)of his home. However, his cousin, Harivallabh Babu, did not approve. Girish Babu and Harivallabh Babu were close friends, so Girish Babu heard about it. One day when the Master had come to Balaram Babu’s home *(actually, the Shyampukur house),* Girish Babu called Harivallabh Babu to come and see the Master. Both of them *(the Master and Harivallabh Babu)* started to weep. I could not understand why. Afterwards I went to see Harivallabh Babu in Cuttack in order to learn the reason, but he did not disclose it.

Balaram Babu would save money from his household budget and use it to serve the monks. His relatives thought he was a miser. I never knew how rich he was! One day, seeing him lying on a narrow bed, I said: “Why don’t you get yourself a larger bed? This one is too narrow for you.” Do you know what he said? “This earthly body will one day return to the earth. Why should money be spent for my bed when it can be much better spent in service to holy people?”

One day Balaram Babu hired a horse carriage for the Master. The fare from Calcutta to Dakshineswar was only twelve annas (three-fourths of a rupee), and such a cheap carriage greatly inconvenienced the Master. One wheel of the carriage came off along the way. The horses did not behave either. If they were whipped, they ran; otherwise they would not move. The Master did not reach Dakshineswar until midnight. Later he would often joke about this incident.

On Kali Puja day the Mother’s temple and the chandni (the covered portico at

the temple garden entrance on the river) would be decorated with lights. Ramlal Dada would come to ask for the Master's blessing before beginning the worship in the temple. During the day the Master would stay in his room, visiting the Mother only at night. Music would be played in the concert tower all night long.

One year Kali Puja fell on a Saturday (an auspicious day for worshipping the Divine Mother). The Master told us: "Practise japam tonight. Anyone who practises japam on very auspicious nights like this will soon reach perfection." The Master did not allow us to sleep that night. He sang until the late hours.

On Jagaddhatri Puja we would go with him to Manomohan Babu's house. Once a musician there played the drum so beautifully that the Master went into samadhi.

The Master went to see a yatra (an open-air theatrical performance) at a devotee's home in the village of Dakshineswar. Baburam, Ramlal Dada, and I went with him. The main actor was a good person, and he greeted the Master warmly. The next day the actor came to the Kali temple and sang many beautiful songs for the Master. Afterwards the Master told him, "Your life's purpose will be fulfilled through the writing of such songs." He asked Ramlal Dada to copy the songs.

Another time a yatra party came to the Dakshineswar temple. I watched the performance all night long. The Master was also there. The story was of a man who loved a woman so much that he dug a tunnel under the ground so that he could meet with her. Just see the power of love! The Master used to say that when three attachments become one, then God is realized. (That is, when one loves God with the combined force of the attachment of the chaste wife for her husband, that of a mother for her child, and that of a rich miser for his wealth, then one is sure to realize him.)

Once when the Master was sick, Doctor Mahendranath Paul came to see him. Before leaving, he gave five rupees to Ramlal Dada for the Master. The Master did not know this. That night he tossed and turned in bed. I fanned him for a long time, but still he was restless. Finally he said to me: "Please call Ramlal. That rascal must have done something — otherwise, why am I not able to sleep?" It was then one or two o'clock in the morning. As soon as Ramlal Dada arrived, the Master said: "You rascal. Go and return that money to the man who gave it to you in my name." Then Ramlal Dada told the Master the whole story. That very night I accompanied him to Mahendranath Paul's house, where he roused the doctor from his sleep and returned the money.

Ram Babu brought a basket of jilipis for the Master one day, but on his way to Dakshineswar he gave one sweet from the basket to a young boy. The Master could not eat the jilipis and he told him, "Never give away a part of anything you

bring for me, for then it cannot be offered to the Divine Mother; and you know that I cannot eat anything without offering it to the Mother first."

Some time after the Master hurt his arm, Tarak (Swami Shivananda) came to Dakshineswar. He brought prasad, holy clay, some holy dust, and a rosary from Vrindaban for the Master. When he noticed the bandage on the Master's arm, he asked, "What happened to your arm?" The Master replied: "I was going to take a look at the moon, when my feet tripped over a low railing and my arm was broken. The suffering has not stopped."

"Is it a dislocation or a fracture?" Tarak asked. "I don't know," said the Master. "These people have simply bandaged my hand. I like to chant the Mother's name with my mind at ease — but just see the trouble now. They won't even let me undo the bandage. Is it possible to call on the Mother in such a painful state? Sometimes I think, what nonsense this bandage is! Let me break all these bonds and merge in the Divine. Then again I think, no, this is just another aspect of the divine play. There is also some joy in this."

Tarak told the Master, "By your mere wish you can be cured." "What!" exclaimed the Master. "Can I cure myself by only a wish?" Then he paused a moment and added: "No. Suffering from this affliction is good, for those who come here with desires will see the condition I am in and will go away. They won't bother me." Then he said, "Mother, you played a clever trick." At that he started to sing. Soon he merged into samadhi.

When Brother Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) came to the Master for the first time, the Master told him: "Look here, my boy. If one does ninety-nine good turns to a person and one bad, the person remembers the bad one and forgets the others. But if he does ninety-nine bad turns to God and one good, the Lord remembers the good one and forgets all the rest. This is the difference between human love and divine love. Remember this."

One day the Master touched Brother Niranjan in ecstasy. Then Niranjan could not close his eyes for three days and nights. He had the continuous vision of light, and he kept chanting the Lord's name. Before coming to the Master he had been interested in spiritualism and would act as a medium. The Master teased him: "This time it is not an ordinary spirit who has possessed you, my boy. The real Divine Spirit has jumped on your shoulders. Try as you may, you won't be able to get rid of him." A man came into the Master's room one day and started to talk about worldly things. The Master said: "This is not the place to talk of such matters. Please go to the temple manager's office." The man left the room. Then the Master told me: "Sprinkle the room with water from the Ganga. That man is a slave to lust and gold. Seven cubits below the spot where he sat is

polluted. Sprinkle the water well."

One day we went with the Master to Bhadrakali (across the Ganga from Dakshineswar) to hear a scholar speak. The man said such foolish things, however, that the audience became confused. The Master told him: "After much *tapasya* a person achieves faith in God; yet you, a scholar, are creating doubt about him. What type of learning do you have?"

The scholar replied nervously: "Oh, no, no, sir. I wasn't serious." The Master understood that the man was merely posing as a great scholar. He touched the man's body and said: "Your mind has become dry, like a weather-beaten piece of wood. After reading so many scriptures, have you learned only to speak hypocrisy?" The scholar was embarrassed and finally left. The Master used to deal in this way with dry intellectuals.

One day Girish Babu came to Dakshineswar quite drunk. The Master asked me: "Go and see if he left anything in his carriage. If you find something, bring it here."

I did as I was told and found a bottle of wine and a glass. I brought both to the Master. When the devotees saw the wine bottle, they began to laugh, but the Master said to me: "Keep the bottle for him. He will want it for a final drink." Just see how liberal the Master was towards his devotees!

Girish Babu arrived one night with Kalipada Ghosh. Kalipada was a terrible drunkard. He refused to give money to his family, spending it for wine instead. But his wife was very pure. I heard that many years earlier she had come to the Master, seeking some kind of medicine that would change her husband's tendencies. The Master sent her to Holy Mother. Holy Mother sent her back to the Master. He again sent her to Holy Mother, and this exchange went on three times. At last, Holy Mother wrote the Master's name on a bel leaf that had been offered to the Lord and gave it to Kalipada's wife, telling her to chant the Lord's name. Kalipada's wife chanted the Lord's name for twelve years. When the Master first met Kalipada, he said, "This man has come here after tormenting his wife for twelve years." Kalipada was startled, but said nothing.

Then the Master asked him, "What do you want?" Kalipada asked shamelessly, "Can you give me a little wine?" The Master smiled. "Yes, I can. But the wine I have is so intoxicating that you will not be able to bear it." Kalipada took him literally and said: "Is it real British wine? Please give me a little to soak my throat."

"No, it is not British wine," said the Master, still smiling. "It is completely homemade. This wine cannot be given to just anyone, for not everyone can stand

it. If a person tastes this wine even once, British wine will seem insipid to him ever after. Are you ready to drink my wine instead of the other?"

For a moment Kalipada was thoughtful, and then I heard him say, "Please give me that wine which will make me intoxicated my entire life." The Master touched him, and Kalipada started to weep. We tried to calm him, but he went on weeping in spite of our attempts.

Once the Master was going somewhere by boat with Kalipada. While they were on the boat, he wrote a mantram on Kalipada's tongue. Later Kalipada became a great devotee and did much to serve the Master. Just see! If the wife is pure and loving, she will even practise austerities for the welfare of her husband. It was because of his wife that Kalipada was saved.

I used to accompany the Master to the theatre, where Girish Babu would show him much respect. He used to arrange for a high box seat for the Master and appoint a man to fan him as well. He himself would often come to see the Master on the upper level. On one occasion Girish Babu approached the Master quite drunk and addressed him affectionately: "You must become my son. I have not been able to serve you in this life, but if you are born again as my son, I can do so. Please promise me that you will be my son."

"What are you saying?" asked the Master. "Why should I be born as your son?" Then Girish Babu became very angry and scolded the Master severely. Hearing him abusing the Master so, I could not hold back my anger. I had a stick in my hand and was ready to hit Girish Babu, but Deven Babu said, "Since the Master is bearing all of this, why should you raise your stick?" I am sure that if Deven Babu had not told me that, I would have given Girish Babu a good blow. I was that angry.

On our way back to Dakshineswar, Deven Babu told the Master what I had almost done. The Master exclaimed: "Wouldn't it have been awful if you had hit Girish? Didn't you notice? After abusing me, he fell to the ground when I got into the carriage and took the dust of my feet. Didn't you see his faith?" And during the trip the Master repeatedly prayed: "O Mother, Girish is an actor. How can he understand your glory? Mother, please forgive him.

"The devotees came to know of the incident at the theatre, and many of them told the Master that he shouldn't visit Girish. Ram Babu also heard about it, and he came to Dakshineswar the following day. As soon as he entered the room, the Master asked him, "Ram, what do you have to say about Girish?" "Sir," Ram Babu told him, "the serpent Kaliya told Krishna: 'Lord, you have given me only poison. Where can I get nectar to offer you?' It is the same with Girish. Where will he get nectar? Why, sir, should you be displeased with him?"

The Master responded, “Then take us in your carriage to Girish’s.” And the Master, accompanied by Ram Babu, me, and two others, started for Girish Babu’s home in Calcutta.

Meanwhile, Girish Babu had been very repentant. He had refused food and was weeping a great deal. We reached his house a little before evening. Hearing that the Master had come, Girish Babu approached him with tears in his eyes and fell at his feet. Only when the Master said, “All right, all right,” did he finally get up.

A long conversation followed. I remember Girish Babu saying: “Master, if you had not come today, I would have concluded that you still had not attained that supreme state of knowledge where praise and blame are equal, and, moreover, that you could not be called a Paramahansa (an illumined soul of the highest order). I would have considered you to be an ordinary man like us. But today I have understood that you are that Supreme One. You will not be able to hide this from me anymore. I shall never desert you. My welfare is now in your hands. Please tell me that you will be responsible for me and that you will save me.”

When Keshab Babu (Keshab Chandra Sen,the Brahmo leader) was very sick, the Master went to see him. Keshab came down from the upper story when he heard that the Master had arrived. After seeing how ill Keshab Babu was, the Master said, “This time I can’t understand the will of the Mother.” Within three or four months Keshab Babu passed away.

An earlier time when Keshab Babu was sick, the Master promised to offer green coconut and sugar to the goddess Siddheshwari after his recovery. Keshab Babu got well, and the Master sent Mother Siddheshwari the promised offerings.

Keshab’s followers invited the Master to join them at a garden house in Sinthi at the time of their annual festival. Many famous people came. It was there that I first met Shivanath Shastri, who was much loved by the Master. The Master would say about him: “When one hemp smoker meets another hemp smoker, he feels happy. In that way I am happy.” But Shivanath would avoid the Master. One day he said he would come to Dakshineswar, but he did not keep his word.

As the story is told in the Bhagavatam, Kaliya was a venomous snake who polluted the sacred waters of the Yamuna river and preyed upon the cows and cowherd boys of Vrindaban. Krishna, the friejid of the cowherd boys, came to slay Kaliya. The snake attacked him, but Krishna jumped onto the snake’s hood. Then Kaliya began to spew out poison in great quantities. When Krishna asked him why he was emitting poison, Kaliya replied: “Lord, it is you who have given me poison. It is all I have with which to worship you. Where shall I get nectar?”

“The Master commented: “He promised me that he would come, but he did

not. That is not good. One should not break one's word. Truthfulness is the tapasya of the kali yuga (the present age). He who does not adhere to truth cannot realize God."

Once he said to Shivanath: "Is it true that you have said that my brain is unbalanced? Day and night you think of worldly things and consider your head to be all right, while day and night I think of God, and you think my head is unbalanced!"

The Master told Mani Mallik one day: "Why do you calculate so much? A devotee should spend all that he earns." When Mani Mallik would visit Dakshineswar, the Master would ask him, "How did you come here?" In order to save money, Mani Mallik used to walk from his home to Garanhata, from there take a share-carriage to Baranagore, and would then proceed to Dakshineswar on foot. On some days his face would be sunburned. The Master asked him: "Why do you come here under such hardship? Can't you come all the way by carriage?"

Mani Mallik replied: "If I ride a one-horse carriage, my children will think it necessary to ride in one with two horses. Also, you have said that a virtuous householder should save money for his children and for charity."

Once Mani Mallik returned from a pilgrimage and told the Master,"I found that in the holy places some sadhus constantly ask for money."

The Master replied: "You are irritated because sadhus ask you for one or two pice? One should not go on a pilgrimage with this sort of attitude. While on pilgrimage one should be charitable. Sadhus earn no money, so one should give a few pice to them. You people want to enjoy all the good things of this world and let the sadhus renounce. You expect them to live on air."

Once there was a scarcity of water in the village where Rakhal was born, so the Master asked Mani Mallik to have a reservoir dug there. Mani Mallik also donated money for the education of poor children.

One day the Master told him: "Now that you are old, forget this world and meditate on God. One should meditate on God in the heart. Thus love grows."

When his son passed away, Mani Mallik came to the Master to unburden his grief. The Master listened to everything. Then he began to sing. When the singing was over, Mani Mallik's grief had melted away.

We often went with the Master to Adhar Babu's house in Shobhabazar. He looked upon Adhar Babu's house as one of his Calcutta "parlours." Sometimes Adhar Babu would arrange a festival at his house and would feed us well. His mother was a great devotee. She would buy costly mangoes in the off-season and send them to the Master, together with bananas and sweets. The Master took

great delight in these things. On one occasion at Adhar Babu's house the Master told him, "Please be sure not to give me a sour mango." So Adhar Babu brought him the best mango he could find. The Master relished it greatly and said, "Most likely this one was selected by your mother!"

One day we were invited to Adhar Babu's house, but Adhar Babu had forgotten to invite Ram Babu, who was greatly offended. Ram Babu complained to the Master, "What wrong have I done to have been left out like this?" The Master tried to console him and said: "Look, Ram, Rakhal was asked to arrange this, and he simply forgot to invite you. Should you be angry with Rakhal? He is just a boy." Later Adhar Babu himself went to Ram Babu's house and invited him to the gathering.

It was also at Adhar Babu's that I first saw the literary genius Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Bankim was extremely intelligent. He tried to test the Master, but he came away outdone. When he was about to leave, he asked the Master to visit him. But since he never sent an invitation, the Master did not go to his house.

Many famous kirtan singers would come to Adhar Babu's house. I remember once hearing a song based on the Chandi that impressed me very much.

Adhar Babu used to come to Dakshineswar every day, even bringing his food with him. Often he would fall asleep once he had arrived. Some people criticized him for this, but do you know what the Master told them? "What do you people know? This is the Divine Mother's place. It is the abode of peace. Instead of engaging in worldly talk, he sleeps. That is all right. A little peace still comes to such people."

One day Adhar Babu asked the Master, "What powers do you have?" The Master laughed and said, "By the grace of the Mother, I lull to sleep those very deputy magistrates who are feared and respected by many others." *(Adhar was a deputy magistrate.)*

The Master visited Kalighat (the famous Kali temple in South Calcutta) now and then and would rejoice there with the devotees. Adhar Babu would provide his carriage for the Master on those occasions.

The Master warned Adhar Babu not to ride on horseback, but he did not listen, and he was killed by being thrown from a horse. On hearing the news of his death, the Master said: "One by one my parlours are closing. I see an end coming to my gatherings."

Some days the mind is in a state in which something one sees makes a particularly deep impression. I saw the Master in samadhi many times, but there

is one time I especially remember. He was showing us that day how to yearn for God. He merged into samadhi and remained so for ten or fifteen minutes. His whole body complexion changed. His face radiated fearlessness and compassion. It is impossible for me to describe that sight, and even now I cannot forget it.

The Passing Away of the Master

Every night, just before going to bed, the Master would say, “Hari Om Tat Sat (Verily, the Lord is the only Reality).” That last night at Cossipore garden house he uttered this as I was fanning him. It was nearly eleven o’clock at night. Then he heaved a sigh and seemed to go into samadhi. Brother Loren asked us to chant “Hari Om Tat Sat.” We continued to chant until one o’clock, when the Master came down from samadhi. Then he ate a little farina pudding which Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) fed him. Suddenly he went into samadhi again. Seeing this, Loren grew worried. He called Gopal Dada (Swami Advaitananda) and asked him to get Ramlal Dada.

Gopal Dada and I left immediately for Dakshineswar, and Ramlal Dada came back with us. He examined the Master and said: “The crown of his head is still warm. Please call Captain (Vishwanath Upadhyay).” Shortly after that Captain arrived. He asked us to rub the Master’s body with ghee (clarified butter). Shashi rubbed his body and Vaikuntha massaged his feet, but it was to no avail. Later that morning Doctor Mahendra *(Doctor Mahendralal Sarkar)* came to examine the Master and said, “He has given up the body.”

Holy Mother was unable to restrain herself. When she came to the Master’s room, she cried, “O Mother Kali, what have I done that you have left me?” Seeing the Mother weeping, Baburam (Swami Premananda) and Yogin (Swami Yogananda) went up to her, and Golap-ma (a woman disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and companion of Holy Mother) took her to her room.

In the meantime the Calcutta devotees had received the news, and one after another they begari to arrive. A photograph *(actually two)* was taken of the Master with the devotees. By that time it was afternoon.

The Master’s body remained on a cot, beautifully decorated, until it was carried to the cremation ground at Cossipore. Ram Babu told me to stay at the garden house until Akshay Babu returned from the cremation ground. So I stayed there while the others went. Only once did I hear Holy Mother weeping. After that she was silent. Never have I seen a woman with such strength.

That night I went to the cremation ground. I saw many people sitting quietly on the bank of the Ganga. Shashi was near the funeral pyre with a fan in his

hand, and Sharat (Swami Saradananda) was with him. Both Sharat and Loren sought to console Shashi. I took him by the hand and tried to lift his spirits a little, but he remained motionless with grief. Then Shashi collected the ashes and bones of the Master and put them in an urn. He placed the urn on his head and carried it to the garden house, where it was kept on the Master's bed.

The following day Golap-ma told us that the Master had appeared to Holy Mother in a vision and had forbidden her to remove her bracelets. He said: **"Have I gone to another place? Here I am. I have just passed from one room to another."** When those who were mourning heard this from Golap-ma, they cast away their doubts. "Service to the Master is to be continued as before," they said.

Niranjan, Shashi, Gopal Dada, and Tarak stayed at Cossipore that day. Holy Mother asked Yogin and me to go to Calcutta to collect food and materials for the worship of the Master. That noon, cooked food was offered to the Master and afterwards the Ram Nam was sung. Then everyone except Gopal Dada, Tarak, and me left for their homes.

Three or four days later, Holy Mother went to Dakshineswar with Golap-ma, Lakshmi Didi [Sri Ramakrishna's niece], and me, but we returned before nightfall. I heard later that at noon that day Shashi, Niranjan, Loren, Rakhal, and Baburam had come to Cossipore, and Ram Babu had visited in the afternoon. Ram Babu wanted to vacate the garden house, so he asked the disciples to return to their homes. Both Niranjan and Shashi were shocked to hear this, for they wanted the worship of the Master to continue. That very night Niranjan left for Balaram Babu's house.

The next day Balaram Babu arrived at Cossipore to escort Holy Mother to his home. They took various articles of the Master's with them. I stayed on at Cossipore with Gopal Dada and Tarak. During those days everyone would come to the garden house at noon and stay until some time during the evening.

Ram Babu wanted to enshrine the relics of the Master at his garden house at Kankurgachi and establish a monastery there, but Shashi and Niranjan refused to accept this idea. They told him that they would not give him the relics. Loren tried to pacify them and said: "Brothers, it is not good to quarrel over this urn. We have no monastery ourselves, and Ram Babu is willing to give the title of his garden house in the name of the Master. It is a good proposition. We should begin his worship there. If we can build our characters according to the Master's ideal, we will have achieved the purpose of our lives."

SWAMI PREMANANDA

(From: Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master, by Swami Saradananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras), vol. 2, 1979; Premananda, by Swami Omkareswarananda (Ramakrishna Sadhan Mandir, Deoghar), vols. I & n, 1935 & 1946; Swami Premanander Patravali (Ramakrishna Math, Bombay), 1963; Swami Premananda (Ramakrishna-Premananda Ashrama, Antpur), 1965; Spiritual Talks, by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta), 1968; Swami Premananda: Teachings and Reminiscences, by Swami Prabhavananda (Vedanta Press, Hollywood), 1968; Prabuddha Bharata (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati), December 1937 & August 1948)

Swami Premananda (1861-1918) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1882 and became his monastic disciple, living with the Master and serving him. His sister was married to Balaram Basu, a great householder disciple of the Master. The Master regarded Swami Premananda as one belonging to the class of Ishwarakotis (great souls) and said that he was pure to his very marrow. In later days the swami was one of the trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and was the manager of the Ramakrishna Monastery at Belur.

Days with Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Brahmananda and I went to Hathkhola ghat to take a boat for Dakshineswar, and there we met Ramdayal Babu. Learning that he was also going to see Sri Ramakrishna, we got in a boat together. It was almost dusk when we reached Rani Rashmani's Kali temple. We went to the Master's room and were told that he had gone to the temple to pay obeisance to the Mother of the Universe. Asking us to stay there, Swami Brahmananda went towards the Mother's temple to find the Master. Soon I saw him holding onto the Master very carefully and guiding him, saying: "Steps. Go up here, down here." I had already heard that the Master would often become overwhelmed with ecstasy and lose outer consciousness. Therefore I knew that he was in an ecstatic mood when I saw him coming, reeling like a drunken man. He entered the room in that state and sat on a small bedstead. Shortly afterwards he came back to normal consciousness and asked me a few questions about myself and my relations. He then began to examine the features of my face, hands, feet, and so on. For some time he held my forearm in his hand to feel its weight, and then he said, "Good." He alone knew what he meant by that. Afterwards he asked Ramdayal Babu about Narendra's health. Hearing that he was all right, the Master said: "It has been a long time since he came here. I want to see him. Please ask him to come sometime."

A few hours were spent delightfully in religious talk. We took our supper at

10:00 P.M. and lay down on the southeast verandah of the Master's room. Beds were arranged for the Master and Swami Brahmananda in the room. But scarcely had an hour passed when the Master came out of his room with his cloth under one arm and came to our bedside. Addressing Ramdayal Babu, he asked affectionately, "Are you sleeping?" Both of us quickly sat up in our beds and replied, "No, sir." The Master said: "Look. I have not seen Narendra for a long time, and I feel as if my whole soul were being forcibly wrung like a wet towel. Please ask him to come once and see me. He is a person of pure sattva qualities. He is Narayana himself. I cannot have peace of mind if I don't see him now and then."

Ramdayal Babu had been visiting Dakshineswar for some time, so the boylike nature of the Master was not unknown to him. Seeing that childlike behaviour, he knew that the Master was in ecstasy. He tried to console the Master by promising that he would see Narendra first thing in the morning and ask him to come, and similar other things. But the Master's mood was not at all alleviated that night. Knowing that we were getting no rest, he would return to his room now and then for some time. But after a while he would forget and again come back to us and begin speaking of Narendra's good qualities, expressing pathetically the terrible anguish of his mind on account of Narendra's long absence.

Observing that terrible pang of separation of his, I was astonished and thought: "How wonderful is his love! And how hardhearted must be that person for whom his longing is so devastating and his behaviour so pathetic!" The night passed in this way. In the morning we went to the temple and paid our obeisance to the Divine Mother. Then, bowing down to the Master, we took leave of him and returned to Calcutta.

Three or four days after my first visit to the Master, I happened to see Ramdayal Babu at Baghbazar, and he told me: "The Master wants to see you. Please visit him." Amazed, I asked, "Why has he called for me?" I didn't realize then how compassionate the Master was.

I again went to Dakshineswar, and as soon as I arrived the Master affectionately asked me to carry some firewood to the Panchavati grove. That day the Master arranged a picnic there. Thus the Master trained us by giving us some responsibilities.

My mother would not allow me to stay very long at our village home (Antpur) even during holidays for fear that I might mix with bad boys and be ruined. But she would cry whenever I left home to return to Calcutta. The Master also used

to cry whenever I left Dakshineswar to return to Calcutta. Oh, how can I explain to you how much he loved us! He would go to Calcutta in a carriage just so he could feed Purna (a young devotee). He would wait near the school where Purna went, send someone to bring the boy, and then feed him delicacies. He would say: “What has happened to me? You do not even have a mat with which to receive me, yet I am restless to see you!”

One day he was found waiting outside Balaram Babu’s house where I was staying. Balaram Babu was not at home, and the Master hesitated to go inside, thinking he might be humiliated. He had come to see me. Someone finally called him in. His love knew no bounds, and one drop of it completely filled us. Each one thus thought himself to be the most beloved of the Master.

He used to tell us, “I can stand everything except egotism.” That is why when he wanted to meet someone, he would send Hriday beforehand to see if that person was proud. He has left a mould for us. We now have to knead the clay of the mind, eliminating all stones and rubbish from it, and cast it in the mould. A beautiful form will then emerge. The Master came for the whole world.

One night I was sleeping in the Master’s room. At dead of night I woke up and found him pacing from one end of his room to the other, saying: “Mother, I do not want this. Do not bring me honour from men. Don’t, Mother, don’t. I spit on it!” Saying this, he paced back and forth like a madman. I was filled with wonder. I thought: “How strange! People are so eager for name and fame, and he is pleading with the Mother not to give it to him! Why is this happening before me? Is it to instruct me?”

The Master could not bear any kind of bondage. If the edge of his mosquito curtain was tucked under the mattress, he would feel suffocated. It was instead dropped around the edge of his bed. He could not even button his shirt. We had to do that for him. And neither could he bolt his door. He saw God in everything. One day someone tore a piece of new cloth in front of him and he cried out, “Oh, pain!”

Be pure. Purity is religion. Unite your speech and mind. Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of purity. A man earned a lot of money by taking bribes. One day this person touched the Master’s feet while he was in samadhi and he cried out in pain. During the Master’s samadhi we had to hold him so he would not fall, but we were afraid. We thought that if we were not pure enough, then, when we touched him during samadhi, he would publicly cry out in pain. So we prayed for purity.

No impure person could live with the Master and give him personal service. It

was the Master's grace that I was allowed to live with him. Once I saw a person secretly put money under the Master's mattress when he was not in his room. Later when the Master came back, he could not go near the bed. His renunciation was phenomenal. Can an ordinary person conceive of such things? We have seen his ideal life, so we speak with conviction.

One day the Master went to see the play *Chaitanya Lila* at the Star Theatre. Before we left Dakshineswar, he said to me: "Look. If I go into samadhi there, people will turn towards me and there will be a commotion. If you see me on the verge of samadhi, talk to me about various other things." But when he went to the theatre he could not stop going into samadhi, even though he tried. I began to repeat the name of God, and slowly he came round. Such experiences of *bhava* (ecstasy), *mahabhava* (great ecstasy), and samadhi were natural with him. He had to struggle hard in order to hold his mind down to the normal plane. Compared to him we are very small receptacles, so we work hard, practising various kinds of spiritual disciplines, to try to attain a little ecstasy. For us it is so difficult.

Knowing that the Master greatly liked lemons, Yogin (Swami Yogananda) used to bring him a lemon every day. One day the Master said to him: "Where did you get the lemon yesterday? I could not eat it." Yogin was aware that the Master could not take things brought from evil or impure persons, but this lemon was from the same tree as the previous lemons. Why was it then that the Master could not take this one? Yogin was very disturbed and began to look for the cause. After careful inquiry he learned that the orchard from which he had been bringing the fruits had changed hands on the day prior to the incident, because the lease had expired. Yogin had received permission to get the lemons from the former lessee. On that particular day, therefore, the permission no longer held, and his taking of the lemon was really a theft, though unconscious. The Master could see the mind of the donor in the things given to him. He could not take any food that had been contaminated by the least sin. How wonderful was his purity! He could not tolerate the approach or touch of any impurity.

One day Vijay Krishna Goswami came and begged the Master to free him from lust. The Master touched him, and that touch produced wonderful results. On another occasion a person came and requested help from Sri Ramakrishna, saying: "Sir, I feel so attracted to my wife that I cannot devote my mind to anything else. All my business is going to rack and ruin. Please change my mental condition." "Very well," said the Master. "Bring some fruits one day. I shall eat up your maya (delusion)." When the fruits were brought, however, the

Master could not eat them. He tried but could not raise them to his lips. I was told the man suffered a great deal afterwards on account of his wife.

The Master showered his grace on Girish Chandra Ghosh and even on many prostitutes. One day the ladies of Balaram Babu's family were sitting before the Master in his room when a prostitute named Ramani passed along the road nearby. The Master called to her and asked, "Why don't you come nowadays?" The ladies were scandalized to hear the Master talking with a prostitute.

Shortly afterwards the Master took them to visit the shrines. When they reached the Kali temple the Master said to the Mother: "Mother, thou indeed hast become the prostitute Ramani. Thou hast become both the prostitute and the chaste woman!" The ladies understood that they were wrong in hating Ramani, that the Master spoke with her, knowing her to be the Mother herself, and that they should not be so proud of their chastity, for it was all due to the Mother's will.

In the beginning we did not understand what true religion was. The Master loved us more than our own parents did. His magnetic love drew us to Dakshineswar. What an attraction! What unconditional love! It was unparalleled. He used to cry for Narendra loudly, and again he would laugh and tease him like a friend.

He explained to us the theory of creation according to the Sankhya philosophy as well as the doctrine of Purusha and Prakriti through humorous stories. Watching his gestures and listening to his stories, we laughed and laughed. He also told us about the cause of creation: "This manifested universe is real, and again, the unmanifest is also real. Purusha [the conscious principle] is true, and again, Prakriti (the unconscious principle) is also true." *(What Sri Ramakrishna meant was that Brahman and Shakti (power) are identical, like fire and its burning power.)*

Sometimes the Master would entertain us by imitating a dancing girl, placing one hand on his waist and moving his other hand about. Again, through humour, tales, and parables, he would explain to us the most intricate philosophies, which were confusing even to scholars. His wonderful skill in teaching left a deep impression on our hearts forever. The Master was adept in explaining the supreme spiritual truths in simple, sweet language.

We saw how lovingly the Master used to receive the devotees at Dakshineswar! He would ask, "Do you want to chew a betel roll?" If the devotee said, "No," he would then ask, "Would,you like to smoke tobacco?" Thus, in so many ways he would take care of the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna was selective in accepting disciples. Once he told Keshab Chandra Sen, “You are having troubles in your organization because through lack of discrimination you allowed black sheep in your fold.” The Master accepted disciples after testing them in various ways. He did not even spare Swamiji. He was versed in physiognomy, and so he used to examine the shape of a disciple’s eyes, hands, feet, and so forth. He knew different ways to judge whether a person was truly a spiritual aspirant or not. He could not bear the atmosphere of worldly people.

Only a jeweller knows the value of a jewel. Only the Master knew the greatness of Swamiji. After his father died Swamiji had to struggle to get a morsel of food for his mother and younger brothers and sisters. In addition, there was a legal battle with his relatives. Hearing about Swamiji’s suffering, the Master said: “Naren was born with great power. But the Divine Mother is preparing him through these trials and tribulations. If he gets regular meals every day, he will overturn the world. He has enough power to institute thirty-six kinds of religious ideas.”

One day Girish Ghosh said to the Master that he would write a book denouncing the left-handed practices of the Kartabhaja sect of Vaishnavism. The Master gravely replied: “It is also a path. Some people have made progress in spiritual life through that path.” He forbade criticism of anybody, even a worm.

“Never see faults in others. Rather see your own faults,” said the Master. Once, in front of the Master, some visitors were criticizing the character of Satish Giri, the abbot of the Tarakeshwar monastery. Immediately Sri Ramakrishna diverted their attention to the abbot’s good qualities.

Once the Master assured a devotee: “Have you committed a sin? Don’t be afraid. Take a vow, ‘I will not sin anymore.’ I shall swallow all of your sins.”

The Master’s life was a living, blazing Upanishad. None could have understood the meaning of the Radha-Krishna cult if Sri Chaitanya had not been born and demonstrated it in his life. In the same way, the Master was the living demonstration of the truths of the Upanishads. The Upanishads have been available for many centuries and many people have read them. Yet people bowed down to our uneducated Master and accepted his words as sacred truths. He never read the Upanishads or other books. How is it that he could explain those subtle and complex truths in such a simple and direct manner?

If you want to read the Vedas, you must first commit the grammar to memory and then read various commentaries in which each commentator has sought to explain the texts in his own way. Innumerable scholars have been arguing over the texts without coming to any conclusion. Our Master, however, explained all those truths in very simple language, and his words are extant. With such a living

fountain before you, why dig a well for water?

When Sri Ramakrishna was bedridden at Cossipore garden house, Naren one day told him, “Sir, you have poured out your affection and grace on me, but I don’t understand what I have achieved!” The Master answered: “Wait a little. Gradually you will understand what you have attained.” Then Naren said: “Sir, you say I shall be able to know in the course of time. But if I die tomorrow?” The Master immediately replied: “All right. You will get it [the highest spiritual experience] tomorrow.”

Sri Ramakrishna lived in this world by giving the power of attorney to the Divine Mother, and Girish Ghosh gave the power of attorney to the Master. Giving the power of attorney means completely surrendering oneself to another. Girish saw his own shortcomings, so he surrendered to the Master for his spiritual welfare. It is an extremely difficult thing to do. As long as a person has an iota of ego, he cannot give the power of attorney to another. The Master used to say, “After giving the power of attorney, one should live like a dry leaf at the mercy of the wind, or like a kitten who remains wherever its mother is pleased to keep it—sometimes on a fancy bed and sometimes on the ashes of the hearth.” That person has truly given the power of attorney who can fix his mind on God without being perturbed by happiness and misery, and who, like Arjuna in the midst of cruel duties, can calmly say, “O Krishna, sit in my heart, and whatever you want me to do I will do.” For one who has renounced all duties and taken complete refuge in God, God takes on the responsibility of that person and frees him from all sins.

The Master encouraged us to read the scriptures and holy books. He kept some books such as *Mukti O Tahar Sadhan* (Liberation and Its Practice) in his room and sometimes asked us to read them to him. When a person is reading about God, his mind is absorbed in him. It is not possible for a person to practise japam and meditation all the time, so studying the scriptures is another discipline. But until God’s grace dawns, everything is futile. The Upanishad says: “This Atman cannot be attained through discussion, or through hearing and memorizing the Vedas. It is realized by him whom the Atman chooses. To such a one It reveals Its real nature.” When God’s grace comes, a person attains infinite knowledge. Then he does not care to read books. There is a great difference between direct realization and mere book learning. The Master used to say, “As long as the southern breeze does not blow, a fan is needed.”

Visiting holy places awakens one’s God-consciousness. But the Master used to say: “Whoever does not have it here (i.e., in the heart), does not have it there (i.e., in holy places). Whoever has it here, has it there too.” Pilgrims make places holy. Suffering people get peace in a holy place because holy people purify it

with their good thoughts and spiritual vibrations. And again, a holy place loses its greatness and purity if worldly people pollute it with evil thoughts and actions. In the old days the real devotees would go through much hardship for a pilgrimage, but now rich people visit holy places either for a change of air or for some other trivial reason.

May Sri Ramakrishna bless you so that you can be absorbed in thoughts of him alone. God is not a matter of talk, but an object of realization. We must find him at any cost in this very life. There is no way for suffering humanity to find permanent peace except through God-realization. He alone can assuage our burning hearts.

SWAMI SHIVANANDA

(From: A Man of God, by Swami Vividishananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras), 1957; Spiritual Talks, by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta), 1968; For Seekers of God, By Swami Vividishananda & Swami Gambhirananda (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta), 1975; Sri Sri Mahapurushjir Katha, (Udbodhan Office, Calcutta), 1934; Mahapurushjir Patravali (Udbodhan Office, Calcutta), 1953; Prabuddha Bharata (Advaita Ashrama), March 1930)

Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) first met Sri Ramakrishna in 1880 in Calcutta. His father was a legal adviser to Rani Rashmani and had met the Master at Dakshineswar a number of times in the late 1850s. Swami Shivananda lived with and served the Master and later practised hard austerities in various holy places of India. The purity of his life earned him his popular name, Mahapurusha (great soul), given to him by Swami Vivekananda. After the passing away of Swami Brahmananda, Swami Shivananda became the second president of the Ramakrishna Order.

First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna

When I was a boy I had a deep longing to know God and realize him, and that longing intensified with the years. Driven by that urge I would go to the Brahmo Samaj and visit holy men, who I thought would be able to help me. What they advised me to do I practised. Family life had no attraction for me, even when I was young. My education came to an end early on account of the straitened circumstances of the family. Since I was the only male child and had two dependent sisters, I had to come to Calcutta to seek a job. This made my heart very heavy, and I often wept and prayed to God, asking him to free me from all these ties.

I first met Sri Ramakrishna in Calcutta at the house of Ram Chandra Datta. A relative of Ram Babu worked in the same office with me. He would visit Sri Ramakrishna and often speak to me about him. In those days I read about the Master in Keshab Chandra Sen’s paper, *Dharma-tattva.* I did not, however, know

where Dakshineswar was or how to get there. I was later told by Ram Babu's relative that it was located opposite Bally Khal.

One Saturday that gentleman informed me that the Master would be visiting Ram Babu's house that day and I could see him if I went there. I said: "The place is very close to where I live. I shall surely go." For many years I had been eager to explore and understand the nature of samadhi. I sincerely wanted to know exactly what it was. I had questioned many people, but no one had been able to explain it to me. One person, however, had said: "None can realize samadhi in this age. I have seen only one man who has, and that is Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakshineswar."

That evening I went to Ram Babu's house. I found the Master sitting in a room crowded with people. The Master was in an ecstatic mood. I saluted him and sat nearby. One can well imagine my surprise when I heard him talking eloquently on a subject which I had been so eager to know about — samadhi! I remember that he elaborated on nirvikalpa samadhi. He said that very few can attain it and that if one attained it, one's body dropped off in twenty-one days.

I did not talk to the Master on that occasion. A month later I went to Dakshineswar and became acquainted with him. In the dim light of an oil lamp I saw the Master seated cross-legged in his room, with three or four others on the floor in front of him. The small audience suited me. At once I felt a deep attachment for the Master. I felt as if I had known him a long time. My heart became filled with joy. I saw in him my tender, loving mother waiting for me. So with the confidence, faith, and certitude of a child, I surrendered myself to him, placing myself entirely under his care. I was certain that at last I had found him for whom I had been searching all these days. From then on I looked upon the Master as my mother. After this momentous visit, my life at home and work at the office became a burden. I often ran to see him, either in Dakshineswar or Calcutta.

During my second or third visit I was serving him when he suddenly touched my chest in an ecstatic mood. That touch made me lose outer consciousness and sent me into a deep meditative state. I do not know how long I remained in that state. As a result, everything became revealed to me. I realized that I was the Atman, eternal and free. I realized that the Master was the Lord born as man for the good of humanity, and that I was on earth to serve him. He gave me a similar blessing another day under the banyan tree in the Panchavati.

Nevertheless, the Master would not allow us to rest on our laurels, but would constantly urge us, with infinite patience, to taste the fruits of realization through our own efforts. He watched our efforts and directed us to go forward according to our temperaments and at our own pace. Bigotry and fanaticism had no place

in his life or teaching. He would accept people of all denominations with the same love and sympathy. To come in contact with him was to become spiritual forever. To live with him was to live in the presence of God.

When we visited him, the thought of whether or not he was a Divine Incarnation never crossed our minds. We could not foresee that he would create such a superhuman movement throughout the world. Who could know then that the whole world would become intoxicated with this man, only three and a half cubits tall? He loved us very much. It was the depth of his love that drew us to him. How shall I describe his love? It was ineffable! In our childhood we had had the experience of parental affection and did not think there could be anything greater. But when we came to the Master and felt his love, we found the affection of our parents to be of a lesser kind. After coming to hirn, we felt that we had arrived home, that all those previous years we had been roaming about in a strange country. Whenever I came to Sri Ramakrishna, that was how I felt. I do not know how others felt. The Master won me over at my very first meeting.

One day Sri Ramakrishna said: “Well, so many people come here. I seldom ask anyone about his home and family, or desire to know anything about these things. But when I first met you I felt that you belonged here, that I would like to know the particulars of your home, parents, and the like. Can you tell me why? Where is your home and what is your father’s name?” In reply I told him I came from Barasat and my father’s name was Ramkanai Ghoshal.

Hearing this, the Master said: “Indeed! You are Ramkanai Ghoshal’s son! Now I understand why the Mother aroused this desire in me for information about your home. I know your father very well. He is the attorney for Rani Rashmani’s estate. The Rani and her family think highly of your father, and whenever he visits the garden at Dakshineswar, they do everything to make him comfortable, carefully arranging his accommodation, meals, servants, and the like. He is certainly a highly developed sadhaka (spiritual man).

“[In the early days — 1850s] whenever he came here, he would take his bath in the Ganga, put on a red silk garment, and enter the Mother’s temple. He looked like a veritable Bhairava [celestial attendant of Shiva]. He was tall, stout, and fair-complexioned, and his chest was always red. He meditated for long periods in the Mother’s temple. And he used to bring with him a musician who would sit behind him singing songs symbolically describing the nerve centres in the human body, as well as songs about Mother Kali. Your father would be absorbed in meditation, with tears streaming down his cheeks. When he left the temple after meditation his face would be flushed with spiritual emotion and nobody would dare approach him.

At that time I was suffering from an unbearable burning sensation all over my body. When I met your father, I said: ‘Well, you are a devotee of the Mother and so am I.I also have a little meditation, but can you tell me why I feel a burning sensation all over my body? Look! The burning sensation is so intense that the hairs of my body have been singed. It is sometimes excruciating!’ Your father recommended that I wear an amulet bearing the name of my Chosen Deity. Strange as it may seem, with the wearing of this amulet, the burning sensation at once diminished. Would you ask your father to visit me sometime?”

In those days I was living in Calcutta, going home only occasionally. My father was very pleased when I told him about Sri Ramakrishna, and he came one day to see the Master. On another occasion the Master said: “Your father’s spiritual practices were attended with some desire for worldly objects. As a result of his spiritual practices, he amassed much wealth and also spent it nobly.”

When I first started visiting the Master, I often felt inclined to cry. One night I was crying uncontrollably by the riverside near the bakul tree. The Master was in his room, and he inquired where I had gone. When I returned he asked me to sit down and said, “The Lord is greatly pleased if one cries to him. Tears of love wash away the mental impurities accumulated through the ages. It is very good to cry to God.”

Another day when I was meditating in the Panchavati grove, my concentration became very deep. The Master came towards me from the pine grove, and as soon as he looked at me, I burst into tears. The Master stood still. I felt something creeping up inside my chest, and I was overcome by a fit of shaking. The Master said that my crying was not insignificant. It was a type of ecstasy. I then followed him to his room where he gave me something to eat. The awakening of the kundalini *(Kundalini — lit., “coiled-up,” the spiritual energy that lies in a dormant state at the base of the spine. When awakened through the practice of yoga, the kundalini rises through the sushumna, and various spiritual experiences occur as it passes through and arouses each of the chakras, or centres of consciousness.)* was an easy matter for him. He could do this even without a touch, but by a mere look.

Days in Dakshineswar

Dakshineswar is our heaven on earth. It is our Kailasa, our Vaikuntha. Is it an ordinary place? Sri Ramakrishna lived there about thirty years. The Panchavati is a great site of spiritual perfection, where the Master had innumerable spiritual experiences of a very high order. For twelve years he practised different modes

of divine communion at Dakshineswar, and the divine visions and spiritual realizations he had there are without parallel. In the history of religion there has never before been

recorded such intense and diversified spiritual practices and such high spiritual experiences in the life of any other Incarnation. The Master used to say, "The experiences that have occurred here *(meaning, in himself)* transcend all those recorded." That is why Swamiji used to refer to the Master as "the greatest avatara."

The Master brought some dust from Vrindaban and spread it on the ground in the Panchavati. Every particle of dust in Dakshineswar is holy. Blessed by the touch of the holy feet of God himself, Dakshineswar has become a great place of pilgrimage. It is a source of spiritual inspiration to people of all denominations—be they nondualists or dualists, Shaktas or Vaishnavas, Shaivas or Tantrikas, for the Master practised all those modes of divine communion and attained perfection in them. This time God manifested his greatest sattvic (pure) qualities. It was that Primordial Power, the great Mother of the Universe, the source of all creation, who freely and joyfully expressed herself, as it were, through the body of our Master. The Master's intense spiritual sadhanas (disciplines) will exert their influence not only on this earth, but also in the higher regions, even to heaven. Ah, what a play of divine power it was!

(Before meeting the Master) I had frequented the Brahmo Samaj. When I met the Master at Dakshineswar, he asked me, "Do you believe in Shakti (Cosmic Power)?" I replied: "No, sir, I prefer the formless aspect of God. And yet I feel that some Power pervades everything." Then he went to the Kali temple and I followed hirn. As he proceeded towards the temple, he was caught up in a divine mood, and when he reached the temple, he prostrated with great devotion before the Mother. I was in a difficult situation. I hesitated to bow down before the image of Kali. And yet I thought that, after all, Brahman is all-pervading. Therefore it must be in this image as well, so I should not hesitate to bow down before it. As soon as this thought arose, I too prostrated before the Mother.

Later on, as I began to visit the Master more frequently, my faith in God with form became stronger. It was my good fortune to have such association with the Master and to receive his grace.

(In response to a devotee's question regarding Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with Sri Sarada Devi)

When Holy Mother came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, he did not send her away. On the contrary, he kept her by his side, gave her advice on

spiritual matters, and with great care encouraged and helped her in every way. But the Master did so after attaining nirvikalpa samadhi. “The Mother who is there in the temple,” the Master said, “is the same Mother who is within this *(referring to his own body).* Again, the Mother who is within me is the same Mother who is in the form of the Holy Mother.” We never wished nor tried to understand why the Master acted the way he did. If you think you can’t understand his ways, you are welcome to do so. The Master acted that way. This is as much as we know.

His hands were very tender. But why speak just of his hands! His entire body was so. For instance, a type of luchi with a hard crust once cut his finger.

At night the Master would eat perhaps one or at the most two small luchis with a little porridge. Because he could not digest whole milk, they would add water and cook it with cream of wheat, making a pudding. He would take a little of that. In the cupboard there would be sweets made of fresh cheese. Whenever he was hungry he would eat one or two pieces or perhaps half of one piece, giving the rest to others who were there. His ways were like those of a child. It was as if he himself were a child.

Although there was nothing special in his eating habits, he did not eat like other people. He was like a boy and would eat according to his whim. Sometimes he would ask for eggplant soup seasoned with cumin. When it was prepared, he would taste a little of it and leave the rest. He was very fond of jilipi and also sandesh .He used to call the jilipi the wheel of the Viceroy’s car. *(All traffic on the street had to make room for the Viceroy’s car to pass. Similarly the jilipi always finds room in the stomach, even if it is full)* The Master was never a big eater. One day he said, “I have a desire to eat cheese pudding.” At that time it was not possible to get cheese in Dakshineswar. One could only get it from a Calcutta market. Meanwhile, Swami Premananda’s mother brought homemade cheese pudding for the Master, and he ate it with joy. What a divine play of the Mother we saw at Dakshineswar!

Once the Master said, “In the future many white-complexioned devotees will come here.” God is all-merciful. He is not limited by time, place, or person. Blessed we are! We had the opportunity to serve the Master, making betel rolls and preparing tobacco for him. How fortunate we are! We served the Master and we received so much love and affection from him! His compassion and love for us were infinite.

In those days we used to sleep on the floor of his room. At bedtime the Master would tell us how to lie down. He would say that if we were to lie flat on our backs and visualize the Mother in our hearts while falling asleep, then we would have spiritual dreams. He asked us to think of spiritual things while going to

sleep. During the summer we used to sleep on the verandah and were bothered by mosquitos.

The Master looked upon Swami Brahmananda as Gopala (the boy Krishna). Occasionally he would send him to visit his relatives at home, but when Swami Brahmananda was not with him the Master had great difficulty managing himself. One night at 1:00 A.M. the Master came out to the verandah where I was sleeping and asked, “Could you chant the name of Gopala for me?” I chanted for an hour. Some nights when he did not have anybody around him, he would call the night guard to chant the name of Rama for him. What love the Master had for the name of God!

We saw how little the Master slept. Now and then he might get an hour or half an hour of sleep at the most. Most of the time he was absorbed in samadhi, and the remaining time he spent in spiritual moods. These moods became very pronounced at night. He would spend the whole night repeating the name of Mother or Hari. When we stayed with the Master at Dakshineswar we were filled with awe. He had no sleep at all. Whenever we awoke we would hear him talking with the Divine Mother in a state of spiritual inebriation. He would pace back and forth in the room, all the while muttering something inaudibly. Sometimes he would wake us in the middle of the night and say: “Hello, my dear boys! Have you come here to sleep? If you spend the whole night in sleep, when will you call on God?” As soon as we heard his voice, we would quickly sit up and start to meditate.

Some days he would start kirtan (devotional singing) accompanied by drums and cymbals, and we would join him. Usually he would sing only the names of God, occasionally improvising words and phrases. Sometimes he danced in ecstasy. Ah! How graceful was his dancing! He would then be transformed beyond recognition. It is impossible to describe his unique spiritual raptures! He had an unusually sweet voice, the like of which we never heard anywhere else. The kirtan would continue till the late hours of the morning. The Master’s ecstasies were contagious, making all those around him ecstatic, and the constant repetition of the Lord’s name made the place a heaven on earth. In what joy we passed our days with the Master!

We saw how the Master went into samadhi more frequently on a day like this Janmashtami day. In spite of his efforts he would not be able to control his spiritual fervour. The natural tendency of his mind was to go high. By sheer force he would bring it down to this earthly plane. The Divine Mother kept his mind on a lower level for the good of the world. Ah! What a sight! He would be so beside himself with spiritual emotion that he could hardly speak. How great was his love for God! Tears would roll down his cheeks in streams. We have

never seen anyone else shedding such tears of love and devotion. Here and there in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we find brief descriptions of that love. Can it be described in any way? Only he who saw it can understand. Spiritual emotion, samadhi, and experiences of that kind were daily events with him. Master Mahashaya (M.) could not be present every day. He would visit the Master at Dakshineswar or elsewhere on Saturday, Sunday, or some such holiday, and he tried to keep a record of whatever happened in his presence.

While coming down from nirvikalpa samadhi (transcendental experience) and still under its influence, Sri Ramakrishna would try to describe that state, but he was never successful. Eventually he would say: “I wish very much to tell you about it, but I cannot. Somebody shuts my mouth.” Really, that state cannot be described. “Only he who has had the experience can understand it.”

One day a great musician came to Dakshineswar with the idea of entertaining Sri Ramakrishna. He was an accomplished musician and he sang beautifully. He began by singing songs about Shiva, but after hearing only one or two songs, the Master became absorbed in nirvikalpa samadhi. His face became flushed, and he throbbed with a divine presence. Moreover, his figure appeared larger than usual, and his hair stood on end. How can I describe that sight? A long time passed, and the Master still did not come down to the normal plane. As the singing continued, all were speechless with wonder. Never had we seen the Master in such deep samadhi nor had we seen his figure appear so large.

After some time the Master suddenly exclaimed, “Oh! Oh!” as if he were suffering unbearable pain within. With great difficulty he said, “Sing about the Mother.” We understood what he wanted, and the singer was requested to sing about the Mother. As the songs continued, the Master’s mind slowly came down to the normal plane. Later on he said that on that day his mind was plunged into such deep samadhi that he had had a hard time bringing it down.

The Master did not like to stay long in nirvikalpa samadhi. He had come for the good of the world, and if he remained in the nirvikalpa state, he could not continue his work. That is why he wanted to maintain the attitude of a devotee and be in the company of devotees. Meditation on Shiva represents the nirvikalpa state. In that state there is neither creation nor this world of living beings. The natural tendency of Sri Ramakrishna’s mind was to go to the nirvikalpa state, so he would cherish some trivial desire in order to bring his mind down. Everything about him was unique!

We observed that the Master could not listen to the entire Shiva Mahimnah Stotram (Hymn on the Greatness of Shiva). After hearing one or two verses he would be absorbed in samadhi. He himself would sometimes recite the two verses (32 and 41) which begin: “O Lord, if the blue mountain be the ink” and

“O Lord, I do not know the true nature of thy being.” As he repeated the last verse he would burst into tears and say: “O Lord, who wants to know thy nature? Who knows who thou art? I do not want to know thee or understand thee, O Lord! Give me pure devotion for thy lotus feet! Who can know thee?”

A monk from northern India came to Ram Babu’s Kankurgachi garden and stayed there for a few days. He had a very gentle disposition and was extremely reserved. He meditated under a tree beside the path leading to the garden. Probably Ram Babu supplied his food and other necessities. One day Ram Babu mentioned this monk to Sri Ramakrishna, and the Master said, “Why not bring the holy man here someday?” Consequently, Ram Babu hired a carriage and brought the monk to Dakshineswar. The Master received the man very kindly in his room, asked him to sit on the small cot, and sat by his side.

The conversation then turned to spiritual matters, and they began to discuss samadhi, both savikalpa and nirvikalpa. All of a sudden, as the Master was describing nirvikalpa samadhi, he became perfectly still, lost in that very state. One of his feet rested on the cot and the other hung down beside it. The monk mistakenly thought that Sri Ramakrishna was just getting ready for meditation. Seeing him in that unusual position, the monk said, “Why not sit in the proper meditation posture?” But how could the Master hear him? Sri Ramakrishna had reached a state of consciousness far above the body and the senses. How could one understand the Master’s samadhi? Nobody knew when, how, or under what conditions he would have it. One could not tell by looking at him. In bed, apparently dreaming or sleeping — why, at any time, under any conditions, samadhi was natural to him.

The Master would not readily allow me to render personal service to him. This often pained me very much. Then, from an incident that happened one day, I learned why he was so unwilling. Who, indeed, can understand his motives? On that day I stayed at Dakshineswar. Other devotees were there also. After spending a long time in his room talking about religious matters, he got up and proceeded towards the pine grove to answer the call of nature. Usually one of the devotees would follow him on such occasions with his water vessel to pour water on his hands, as he could not touch anything metal. When he went to the pine grove that day, I carried the water pot and waited at the proper place for his return. On his way back, when he found me standing there with the water pot, he said: “Now, look here. Why did you do such a thing? Why did you come with the water pot? How can I accept water from your hand? Can I accept service from you? I honour your father as a guru.” I was struck with wonder. Only then did I realize why he would not allow me to render service to him. The Master

had infinite moods. How could we fathom them? We can understand only that which he allows us to understand.

I had to marry against my wish, and that was a great trial. My determination to renounce the world deepened as I prayed night after night with tears in my eyes, asking God not to bind me with worldly chains. I spoke about it to the Master and prayed that my worldly bonds be destroyed. After hearing my story the Master asked me to perform a certain ritual. Then he said in a tone of assurance: "Have no fear. I am here to protect you. Think of me and perform this ritual. Nothing adverse will happen to you. I am telling you that even if you sleep in the same room with your wife, you will be free from danger. You will see, your spirit of renunciation will instead be intensified."

On the death of my wife I was free from all bondages, and I ran straight to Dakshineswar. I begged the Master to allow me to stay with him, and he kindly accepted me. For those last three years of his life I lived almost constantly with him. At Dakshineswar I met Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) as well as Swamis Brahmananda and Premananda. Among us Swamiji was most loved and trusted by the Master.

The Master had prescribed the same ritual for Swami Brahmananda as he had for me. I went through it as instructed and didn't have any trouble. Once, in the course of conversation, I mentioned this fact to Swamiji. He was very surprised and remarked: "What do you say? That is the characteristic of a Mahapurusha (great soul). You are certainly one." After that he started calling me by this name, and others did the same. Previously Swamiji had called me" Tarak-da." One day at Balaram Babu's house, when Swamiji called me Mahapurusha, Swami Premananda's mother said: "What? Isn't a Mahapurusha one who lives in a tree? *(She meant a ghost)* What kind of Mahapurusha is he?" Swamiji explained that I was a genuine Mahapurusha. It pleased her very much.

In the course of time, as a result of my frequent visits to the Master, I made up my mind to give up all connection with the world, and I went to say goodbye to my father. Tears began to trickle down his cheeks. He asked me to salute the deity in our shrine, and then he blessed me. Placing his hand on my head, he said: "May you realize God! I myself tried to renounce the world and realize him, but I failed. Therefore I bless you that you may attain God!" I repeated this to the Master. He was quite pleased to hear it and said, "It is good that this has happened!"

We heard from the Master that a few days before Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) came to Dakshineswar for the first time, the Master had a vision: The Mother brought a child and placed him on his lap, saying, "Here is your

child.” The Master was startled and said to the Mother: “How can I have a child? I am a monk.” The Mother smiled and said: “He is not a child in the worldly sense. He is your spiritual son.” Upon hearing this, the Master felt relieved. Later, when Maharaj came to Dakshineswar, the Master at once recognized him as *the child in his vision.* From the very beginning of his relationship with the Master, Maharaj behaved like a five-year-old child. And like a petulant boy he often made demands upon the Master. Sometimes he even climbed up on his shoulders or sat on his lap, and how many other childlike things he did! Those were unique sights to behold — divine phenomena. From the ordinary human standpoint one cannot understand these things.

At one time M. stayed for a while at Dakshineswar. His food was very simple, consisting primarily of milk and rice. The Master himself arranged to have a pint of good milk brought to him every day. M. had a very strong body, which enabled him to do so much of the Master’s work. Whatever he heard from the Master he would note down in his diary after returning home. He had a prodigious memory. By exercising his memory through meditation, he was able to compile *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* from the meagre notes he had jotted down. He belonged to the group of Sri Ramakrishna’s intimate disciples. The Master brought M. with him for that particular work. M. visited the Master every Saturday or Sunday or on holidays. He also saw the Master in Calcutta and elsewhere. On such occasions interesting subjects were sure to be discussed, with a big crowd present. During these discussions, Sri Ramakrishna would suddenly turn to M. and ask: “M., did you understand? Note that point well.” Sometimes the Master would repeat certain points. We did not realize then why he spoke to M. that way.

The Master’s words were so impressive and instructive that I too felt tempted to take notes. One day at Dakshineswar I was listening to him and looking intently at his face. He was explaining many beautiful things. Noticing my keen interest, the Master suddenly said: “Look here! Why are you listening so attentively?” I was taken by surprise. He then added: “You don’t have to do that. Your life is different.” I felt as if the Master had divined my intention to keep notes and did not approve of it, and that was why he had spoken in that way. From that time on I gave up the idea of taking notes of his conversations, and whatever notes I already had I threw into the Ganga.

The Master was very fond of the Adhyatma Ramayana, a devotional scripture on the life of Ramachandra. There were two books on his small cot—the Adhyatma Ramayana and *Mukti O Tahar Sadhan* (Liberation and Its Practice). It was not possible for him to read those books, because most of the time he was in

an ecstatic mood, but he would often ask someone to read them to him.

Anyone who takes shelter in the Master with all sincerity and with his whole being, anyone who loves the Master, will surely attain liberation. There is a story about a sweeper named Rasik who lived at Dakshineswar. He used to call the Master "Father." One day the Master was returning from the direction of the Panchavati, absorbed in a spiritual mood. At that time Rasik knelt down before him and prayed with folded hands: "Father, why don't you bless me? What will happen to me?" The Master assured him: "You have no need to fear. You will have your wish fulfilled. You will see me at the time of death." And that is exactly what happened. Shortly before his death, Rasik was carried to a holy spot near the tulsi plant. As the moment of death approached, Rasik cried out: "You are here! You have come to me, Father! You have really come, Father!" And thus he breathed his last.

The Master used to say: "As long as the child is busy with his lollipop, he is forgetful of his mother and she attends to her duties. But the moment the child tires of the lollipop, throws it away, and begins crying for the mother, she drops everything, runs to the child, and takes him up in her arms." As long as one remains attached to the lollipop of this world, one will not see God. It is most unfortunate if one does not avail oneself of the blessed privilege of being born a human being. In order to bring home this idea, the Master would often sing this song:

O mind, you do not know how to farm!
Fallow lies the field of your life.
If you had only worked it well,
How rich a harvest you might reap!
In the song is this line:
Sooner or later will dawn the day
When you must forfeit your precious field;
Gather, O mind, what fruit you may.

The Master was right when he said that spiritual aspirants become sidetracked —nay, lost for a while—if they direct their minds to supernatural powers. The Mother told the Master that psychic powers should be shunned as filth. But in the case of Jesus, the miracles he performed were done not with the idea of showing off, but out of compassion to mitigate the sufferings of people. It is mentioned in the Bible that Jesus, while giving sight to the blind and healing a leper by a touch, cautioned them not to make it public. He did not do those things for name and fame or popular applause. The scriptures say that knowers of Brahman who survive after illumination are supremely compassionate and

live in the world to do good to humanity. They do not have any other desire or wish.

Furthermore, Jesus was not an ordinary illumined soul. He was an Incarnation of God. His identity was merged with God, the Heavenly Father. In his case, performing miracles was neither unnatural nor wrong. While common people think those acts are extraordinary or impossible, for Divine Incarnations they are as easy as breathing. By their mere wish the impossible becomes possible. In certain cases Jesus used supernatural powers in order to create in the minds of unbelievers faith in God's existence. It is often difficult to comprehend the significance of the actions of Divine Incarnations.

To heal physical ailments by a touch is not so miraculous. It is rather an easy thing. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated greater supernatural powers when by a touch he gave God-vision or samadhi. The greatest miracle consists of instantaneously directing a person's mind to God by reducing the layers of his strong impressions stored from birth to birth. No other Divine Incarnation did this. Oh, what marvellous things we saw the Master do! It makes our hair stand on end to think of them! He could play with a human mind and fashion it as he liked. By his touch the sickness of a mind could be cured. What stupendous spiritual powers he possessed! Outwardly he behaved like an ordinary man, but within him acted the Omnipotent God.

It was to save the sinners and the afflicted that the Master incarnated. If anyone takes shelter in him with all sincerity, he passes his merciful hand over the supplicant and wipes away all his sins. By his divine touch one immediately becomes sinless. What is needed is sincere love for him and absolute surrender to him. Girish Babu had committed many sins,but the Master was impressed by his devotion and so accepted him as his own. That is why Girish Babu used to say at the end of his life, "Had I known there was such a huge pit in which to throw one's sins, I would have committed many more." The Master is full of compassion. He is a veritable sea of mercy.

Whether the Master is only a wave of the ocean of Satchidananda or the ocean itself, I do not know. But this much I do know — that he alone is true and all else is illusory. By realizing him one can know everything—ocean, creek, canal, and pool. And the means of realizing him are faith and devotion. Anyone can pray to him according to his own liking. By merely knowing the world, one cannot realize him. But through discrimination and reasoning, one can gain true understanding. Philosophical speculations ultimately lead to the conclusion that the world is illusory and the Lord, who is Infinite, alone is true. That perfect Godhead is Sri Ramakrishna. He himself graciously assumed the form of a man

so that human beings might be able to understand him.

There is nothing very striking in the incidents of my life to write about except one incident which is most special: my meeting with Sri Ramakrishna and the mercy granted to me out of his goodness. I had no special virtue to merit his mercy. He is self-willed, free, and independent. He, through his own will, has btessed me. This is the only incident worth mentioning in my life.

At Cossipore Garden House

Sri Ramakrishna was seriously ill and was staying at the Cossipore garden house while under treatment. Most of us were living there with him to nurse him. Taking turns, we waited on him day and night. Surendra, a well-to-do householder devotee, arranged for all the necessities.

A cook had been engaged, but when he fell ill, we had to take turns cooking. Our meals were very plain, usually consisting of rice or unleavened bread, lentils, vegetables, soup, or similar dishes. We were in such a mental state that we didn't pay any attention to food at all. We ate whatever we could get. In the first place, the Master was so sick, and then we were all deeply absorbed in severe spiritual disciplines.

One night it was my turn to cook for the household. As I was adding the final spices to the vegetables, the smell spread through the house and reached the Master upstairs. He asked the nearby attendant: "What is cooking? Excellent! The aroma of the spices is everywhere! Who is the cook?" When he learned that I was the cook, he said, "Go and bring me a little of it," and he tasted a tiny bit of the preparation. Because of the cancer in his throat he could hardly swallow anything. He would eat with great difficulty a little cream of wheat cooked in milk, but most of the time he was not able to swallow even that.

Because of his repeated spiritual experiences the Master hardly had any consciousness of the external world. How happily we passed our days serving him and practising austerities at the Cossipore garden! It seemed the Master took this sickness upon himself in order to gather us together and lay the foundation of his future Order. Inscrutable are the ways of a Divine Incarnation.

At one time we discussed Buddhist philosophy at length. Swamiji was well versed in Buddhism. The rest of us had read a little. We used to have heated arguments. In those days we didn't believe in the existence of God. Some of the devotees were very hurt by this. Swamiji himself would not say much, but he would egg me on. I would argue my point vigorously, and Swamiji would listen quietly and enjoy the fun. Sometimes I would even say that it was harmful to have body-consciousness, for it interfered with meditation. Even the thought of God would not allow the mind to be free from modifications. It was not just that

we expressed ourselves that way —our meditations and experiences also were of that nature. We couldn't think otherwise in those days. We were so absorbed in those ideas.

Some devotees brought this matter to the notice of the Master, and he told them: "What they say is also true. There is a stage in spiritual life when the seeker does not admit the existence of God." This phase of ours lasted quite awhile. Even after the Master had passed away and we were living at the monastery in Baranagore, these ideas persisted. We were still atheistic.

One day the Master appeared to me and said: "The guru is all in all. There is no one higher than the guru." The moment I had that vision these ideas left me and did not return. Sri Ramakrishna was a Divine Incarnation, born to establish religion.

Why should the Master have been a kalpataru only on one day *(The day [January 1,1886] on which Sri Ramakrishna blessed the devotees at the Cossipore garden house, fulfilling their spiritual desires like the mythological kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree.)*? To tell the truth, he is a kalpataru every day. His only work is to shower his grace on all creatures. We saw with our own eyes how he blessed innumerable people in so many ways. It is true that on that particular day, in the Cossipore garden, he blessed quite a number.of devotees all at one time. In that sense, this day has a special significance, for it was on this day that the devotees palpably felt his infinite grace.

None of the monastic disciples of the Master was present at that time. The Master was seriously ill, and our hearts were then full of the spirit of renunciation. He was passing through such a critical period of his illness that we kept vigil twenty-four hours a day. The lay devotees would come during the daytime according to their convenience and arrange for the medicines, diet, and all other necessary expenditures. But we shouldered the entire responsibility of nursing him. And along with that we continued our intense spiritual practices. The Master also encouraged us in this. He would call us individually and guide our spiritual disciplines. He kept himself informed on the progress we made in meditation and the kinds of visions we were having. At night Swamiji would sit in meditation with us around a blazing fire under the sky, and sometimes we would sing devotional songs. The whole night would pass thus in divine ecstasy while we served the Master by turns.

Since we had to keep awake at night, most of us would take a nap after lunch. On that January, 1, we were resting after lunch in the small room adjacent to the downstairs hall, when for the first time at Cossipore the Master came downstairs for a stroll in the garden. It was a holiday and many devotees were present in the garden. Seeing the Master, they followed him joyously. He was walking slowly

towards the gate of the garden when Girish Babu, after prostrating himself at the Master's feet, began to sing his praises with folded hands. These words, full of sincere devotion and faith, sent the Master into deep samadhi while he was standing. Finding him in a divine mood, the devotees started exclaiming in great joy: "Victory to Sri Ramakrishna! Victory to Sri Ramakrishna!" and saluted him again and again.

Gradually the Master regained partial consciousness, and he turned his benign eyes on them, saying: "What else shall I say? May you all have your spiritual consciousness awakened!" No sooner had he uttered these words than the devotees felt an upsurge of ineffable bliss within themselves. They exclaimed repeatedly: "Glory to Ramakrishna! Glory to Ramakrishna!" and saluted him.

Then, still in a state of divine absorption, he touched most of them one by one, saying, "Be illumined!" As a result of that divine touch, the devotees felt wonderful spiritual stirrings within themselves. Some of them were lost in meditation, some danced with joy, some wept, and some shouted his praises like madmen. It was an unimaginable sight. The Master stood looking at them with great joy.

Their joyous uproar roused us from our sleep. We rushed out and saw the devotees all around the Master, behaving like lunatics, and he himself looking at them graciously with a smiling face, full of affection. By the time .we joined them the Master's mind had returned to the human plane, but the devotees were still in an ecstatic mood, intoxicated with divine bliss.

Later on we learned about the incident from the devotees. All of them acknowledged that the Master's touch had given them wonderful spiritual realizations, and that that experience had lasted quite a long time. And why shouldn't his touch be that effective? Wasn't he God himself? Yet even on that day the Master did not touch one or two devotees, saying that they would have illumination later. From this it is clear that nothing happens unless the time is ripe. One has to wait for the right moment.

We never felt any strain or hardship (at Cossipore). In those days we spent our time immersed in a particular mood. We were so absorbed in doing personal service for the Master, in practising meditation and austerity, that we often were not aware of the passing of day or night. Those were indeed unique days. After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, most of the young disciples, except Swami Adbhutananda and me, went back home. Though Swamiji also returned home, he used to visit the garden frequently and was in close touch with us.

The Master's relics were preserved at the Cossipore garden, and we worshipped them daily. We could stay at the garden for a few days because the rent had been paid for the whole month. Swamiji and a few of us decided that

the relics must be preserved and buried somewhere on the bank of the Ganga, as this had been the Master's wish. But we could not find a suitable place.

Meanwhile Ram Babu had arranged to take the relics to his garden house in Kankurgachi, Calcutta. We felt very sad, especially at the thought that the Master's wish would not be fulfilled, so a message was sent to Balaram Babu asking him to bring an earthen jar. He came at once. That very night we removed all the bones from the ashes, put them in the earthen jar, sealed it with clay, and sent the jar to Balaram Babu's house in Calcutta where the family deity was regularly worshipped. The relics began to be worshipped there daily.

In the meantime Ram Babu took the remaining ashes to Kankurgachi. As we did not tell him about our having removed the bones from the ashes, he did not know what had happened. The relics we kept then (at Balaram Babu's house) are now worshipped daily at the monastery here (at Belur Math). Swamiji used to refer to that jar of relics as the urn of Atmarama (one who rejoices in himself). We also call it by the same name.

The Master once told Swamiji, "Wherever you place me, carrying me on your head, I shall live." On the day this Belur monastery was consecrated, Swamiji carried, Atmarama's urn on his head and installed it here. There was an elaborate worship, fire sacrifice (homa), and an offering of food. I cooked the rice pudding to offer to the Master. After installing the Master in this monastery, Swamiji said: "Today the heaviest responsibility in this world is off my head. Now it matters little even if I leave this body." Thereafter all our spiritual practices centred on this Atmarama.

It was the Master himself who instituted the monastic Order that bore his name. And Swamiji organized this Order to maintain the spiritual power with which the Master came to this world. Swamiji started the work with this Math as its main centre. This is the powerhouse of that spiritual energy. It is from here that the spiritual current will rush forth to deluge the entire world.

I doubt that anyone will ever be able to fully determine the infinitude of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual realizations.Some see a contradiction between the realization of the Divinity in human beings and the acceptance of universal suffering, a primary motive for service. It seems to me that these are merely two aspects of the same thing and not two different things. It is only by realizing the inherent Divinity of human beings that we can truly feel the depth of their misery — for only then does the state of people's spiritual bondage and the deprivation of Divine perfection and bliss become evident. It is the painful awareness of the contrast between the Divinity within human beings and their present ignorance of it and consequent suffering, that inspires the heart to serve them. Without the realization of the spirit within oneself and others, true

sympathy, love, and service are impossible. This is why Sri Ramakrishna wanted -his disciples to attain Self-realization first. Then they could devote themselves properly to the service of humanity.

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

(from: Udbodhan (Udbodhan Office, Calcutta), vol. 8, no. 2,1905; from: Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples and Days In An Indian Monastery, by Sister Devamata (Ananda Ashrama, La Crescenta), 1928 & 1927; from: Udbodhan, vol. 44, no. 12,1942)

Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) came to Sri Ramakrishna with his cousin, Swami Saradananda, when they were both college students at St. Xavier's College, Calcutta. Because of his devoted service to Sri Ramakrishna, he was given his monastic name after the Master. When Swami Vivekananda returned to India after his first trip to the West, he sent Swami Ramakrishnananda to Madras to start a centre there.

Sri Ramakrishna's Personality

Everything about Sri Ramakrishna is superhuman. I heard from his own lips, "The key to this room has to be turned the reverse way." This means that if anybody wants to attain knowledge, worldly means will be of no avail. Sri Krishna also taught the same thing: "In that which is night to all beings, the man of self-control is awake; and where all beings are awake, there is night for the sage who sees." Sri Ramakrishna's pure life is a glowing example of this teaching of the Gita (2.69). His life is beyond ordinary human understanding. For what people regard as good was bad in his eyes, and what people regard as giving them happiness and peace he knew to be the cause of all misery and restlessness. His divine power was unparalleled and irresistible. In order to explain this phenomenon it is necessary to cite a few instances from his life.

Wherever there is the play of great power, there God manifests. Now one may ask: What greatness can be found in a temple priest, who draws a monthly salary of only seven rupees, that would make people revere him as a manifestation of God? From a human viewpoint it seems to be impossible. A few years ago Sri Ramakrishna's greatness was not known to the world at large, but today there is no nation that has not heard of him and does not regard him with great reverence. What is the reason? His poverty and lack of education are two factors that highlight his greatness. A desired object is attained by a certain means, and practice of that means brings perfection. It does not require proof, therefore, to

understand that he who can attain a desired object without any visible means or effort on his part, possesses great powers.

One will have to admit unequivocally that divine power is manifested in a person who, singlehandedly and without any arms and ammunition, defeats a well-equipped army. Nowadays, if people want to be scholars, they study many books. The greater the number of books one has read the more learned he is supposed to be. But Sri Ramakrishna did not study books. Sometimes he would say, “Grantha granthi” that is, books are knots. Mere book learning usually increases a person’s ego, binding him to this world.

When Sri Ramakrishna was young he met a pundit of the Vedanta philosophy, who taught him about the impermanence of the world and the reality of God. From their talk the Master thought that the pundit was free from all worldly attachments. One day, however, he saw the pundit performing rituals as a priest for a little rice. This convinced him that mere book learning does not help a person attain true knowledge, and that there must be some other means to attain it. Thus he became disgusted with book learning. Later, seeing the pundits talk about the transcendental truths of Vedanta, he often compared them to vultures. As vultures soar very high though their eyes are always on the charnel pits, so the pundits constantly talk about high spiritual matters but their minds are on money. Once one of his disciples was studying the literature of the Parsis, neglecting his service to the Master. Sri Ramakrishna told him: “My boy, this book learning will make your mind more restless. It may even destroy your love for God.” This scolding brought the disciple to his senses.

By reading too many books the mind becomes filled with other people’s thoughts and loses the capacity of thinking for itself. If book learning stimulates one’s thinking it is good, but if it destroys one’s capability to think, then it is to be avoided.

Sri Ramakrishna shunned such learning and sought spiritual knowledge in his own pure mind. Within a short time he acquired so much knowledge that from his inexhaustible supply he freely distributed it to people. The rich, the poor, the learned, and the ignorant—all felt themselves blessed by listening to his holy words.

We had read in the Upanishads that there are two types of knowledge—the higher and the lower. The lower knowledge is considered to be the study of the scriptures, while the higher knowledge is that through which one realizes God. We could not understand this truth until we came in contact with Sri Ramakrishna. With the help of this higher knowledge (the knowledge of Brahman) the Master could dispel the ignorance of both the pundits and the illiterate. Nowhere else has such a phenomenon been seen. This proves that he

was God Incarnate.

Nowadays it is almost impossible for a person to be respected without wealth. Wealth makes even a fool appear learned and the impossible possible. So nowadays wealth is worshipped everywhere. But Sri Ramakrishna realized that attachment for wealth binds the soul and it is the root cause of all evil. He had such great repulsion for coins that he could not even touch a metallic object. If his hand touched any such object, it would become numb. It is because of his complete renunciation of money that wealthy people regarded themselves as blessed when they could serve him and spend money for him. Wealth flows to that person who has renounced it. This fact is proved in Sri Ramakrishna's divine life.

Saving for the future is essential for a person who lives in the world as no one knows what need may unexpectedly arise. But Sri Ramakrishna could not save anything even for the next moment. Because he was so nonattached, other people used to procure things for him. We had read in the Gita: "Persons who meditate on me, without any other thought, to them, thus ever zealously engaged, I carry what they lack and preserve what they already have." (9.22) But at that time we could not understand the true significance of this statement. Later Sri Ramakrishna's divine life made it quite clear to us.

In this world the tie of love alone is the cause of happiness. People enjoy family life because of this sweet bondage. It is for this bondage that a person builds a home, weaves a cloth, saves things in a safe, locks the door, and dresses himself with knots. A man who has no such bondage is a mendicant. Even a beggar ties into a bundle his old torn and tattered rags lest he should lose them. So bondages of some kind or other are indispensable for a person living in the world. But Sri Ramakrishna feared any kind of bondage. Bondages bind the soul to the world and do not allow him to reach God. They rob a person of his precious freedom. Bondages do not let a person's heart expand. He who wants to drink the divine nectar of God, or wants to move freely and fearlessly in the realm of maya, should not have any ties of attachment in his heart. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna had such a terrible aversion to being bound that he could not lock anything in his room. Also, he could not even tie his own cloth around his waist —someone had to do it for him. His nature was like that of a five-year-old boy. For this reason the Divine Mother engaged several attendants to look after him, and they felt blessed to be able to serve this great soul.

Sri Ramakrishna knew the Divine Mother Kali was his real mother. As a child is unwilling to leave its mother's lap, so also was he reluctant to be separated from his beloved Mother. He lived with the Divine Mother all the time and fearlessly floated in an ocean of bliss. He knew very well that one cannot have

pure bliss anywhere in this world except from the Divine Mother. For this reason he used to guide the seekers of bliss to the Mother. In reality, as long as you regard all women as your mother, they also look upon you as their child. But the moment you look at them with lust, you are possessed by a strong desire to marry. And once you are married, the responsibility of maintaining your wife is on your shoulders. A wife has to be taken care of. Before your marriage you were living without responsibilities and in great bliss. You were taken care of by others. But once you accept the bondage of married life you become scorched by the fever of anxieties. You carry on your head the burden of misery and lead a troubled life. Your forehead is wrinkled with anxieties, and peace of mind has left you forever. That is why Sri Ramakrishna used to say: “Look at the newborn calf, how it skips about in great glee as though it is born to live in joy. But from the day the rope is put around its neck it looks depressed and its happiness gradually diminishes. Before marriage a person is as happy as that calf, but when the rope of worldly ties is put around his neck, happiness deserts him.” Freedom is the source of happiness. Freedom makes a person all-powerful. Sri Ramakrishna never lost his freedom. No ties could bind him. Moreover, his heart was as broad as the infinite space, and that is why he could appreciate all the religions of the world. He used to say: “Never say that God is this or that. No one has yet been able to know God as he really is, and no one ever will. He is the ocean of consciousness. Sages like Shuka, Sanaka, and Narada drank a drop of that ocean and became God-intoxicated. I have experienced God as with form, without form, and again beyond both. But what he really is I do not know. All religions of the world are but different paths to reach him. Follow sincerely that path laid down by the religion you were born in and you will in time reach the abode of Eternal Bliss.”

There was not the least trace of egotism in Sri Ramakrishna. He could not say the words *I* and *mine*. Instead of using the word *mine*, he used to say “of this place” and point to himself with his finger. For .example, when he wanted to say that something was not his opinion, he would say, “It is not the opinion of this place.” Because there was no ego-consciousness in him, the Cosmic Ego of the Divine Mother worked through him. The playful Kali, the Mother of the Universe, incarnated herself in the form of Sri Ramakrishna to give her innumerable children knowledge and devotion.

I have tried to give the readers some glimpses of Sri Ramakrishna’s personality, but it is beyond my power to describe in full even a particle of his infinite glory. If you are eager to know the Truth, then meditate on the all-purifying, all-compassionate life of Sri Ramakrishna. Gradually the self-

luminous Truth will reveal itself in your heart, and you will attain infinite strength, peace, and joy. You will consider yourself as blessed.

SWAMI SARADANANDA

[From: Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master, by Swami Saradananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras), vol. 2,1979; Swami Saradanander Jivani, by Brahmachari Akshay Chaitanya (Model Publ ishing House, Calcutta), 1955; Gitatattva and Bharate Shaktipuja, by Swami Saradananda (Ud-bodhan Office, Calcutta), 1966,1967; Spiritual Talks and The Message of Our Master, by The First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta) 1968 & 1944; Glimpses of a Great Soul, by Swami Aseshananda (Vedanta Press, Hollywood), 1982; Prabuddha Bharata, March 1930; Udbodhan, vol. 35, no: 8,1933]

Swami Saradananda (1865-1927) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1883 and became an ardent disciple of the Master, His premonastic name was Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty. After the Master's passing away he travelled all over India as an itinerant monk, and he then went to England and America in 1896 at Swami Vivekananda's request to preach the message ofVedanta there. In 1898 Swami Saradananda was recalled to India by Swamiji to become the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He held that office until his death in 1927. He is the author of Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master, *the authoritative biography of Sri Ramakrishna.*

An Evening with Sri Ramakrishna

It was Monday, November 26,1883.I was then studying at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta and had had the privilege of meeting Sri Ramakrishna only two or three times. As the college was closed that day, we (Barada Pal, Hari Prasanna — later Swami Vijnanananda, and Swami Saradananda) decided to visit the Master in the afternoon. We went by boat and reached Dakshineswar at 2:00 P.M.

As soon as we entered the Master's room and bowed down to him, he said: "Ah, you have come today! I would not have met you had you come *a* little later. I am going to Calcutta to attend the Brahmo festival, and a carriage has been called. But it is nice that you could see me. Please sit down. What a disappointment it would have been if you had been forced to return home without seeing me."

We sat on a mat spread on the floor of his room and asked him, "Sir, would we be allowed at the Brahmo festival which you are attending?" The Master replied: "Why not? You are free to go there if you like. It is at the house of Mani Mallik of Sinduriapati." Seeing a slender, fair young man enter the room, the Master asked him, "Could you tell these boys the number of Mani Mallik's

house?" The young man humbly said, "81 Chitpore Road, Sinduriapati." Later we learned that he was Baburam (later, Swami Premananda),

The carriage arrived shortly after. The Master asked Baburam to carry his towel, warm clothes, and a small spice bag. Then bowing down to the Mother he entered the carriage. Baburam took the Master's things and sat on the other side of the carriage. Another person also went with the Master to Calcutta. On inquiry we learned that he was Pratap Chandra Hazra.

Fortunately a passenger boat was available, and we took it to Barabazar, Calcutta. Then in the evening we went to the festival. Scarcely had we reached the road in front of thie house when sweet music and sounds of a mridanga greeted our ears. Knowing that the kirtan had begun, we hurried to the parlour. What we saw defies description! There were crowds of people both inside and outside the hall. So many people were standing in every doorway and on the western roof that it was almost impossible to push through the crowd into the room. All were craning their necks and intently watching what was going on inside the hall. Full of devotion, they were totally unaware of their surroundings. Seeing that there was no possibility of entering the room through the front door, we went around the house, crossed the western roof, and reached the northern door of the hall. As the crowd there was somewhat thinner, we were able to thrust our heads into the room and we saw a wonderful scene.

We felt that high waves of heavenly bliss were flowing in the room. All were completely lost in the kirtan. They were laughing, crying, and dancing. Some, unable to control themselves, fell on the ground. Overwhelmed with emotion, others acted crazy. The Master was dancing in the centre of that God-intoxicated group, now rhythmically going forward with rapid steps and again going backward in a similar way. In whichever direction he would move, the people, as if enchanted, would make room for him.

An extraordinary tenderness, sweetness, and leonine strength were visible in every limb of the Master's body, and his face shone with a divine smile. It was a superb dance! In it there was no artificiality or affectation, no jumping, no unnatural gestures or acrobatics. Nor was there seen any absence of control. Rather, one noticed in the Master's dancing rhythmical and natural gestures and movements of limbs. It seemed as if an overflow of grace, bliss, and sweetness surged from within, like a big fish happily swimming all over a vast, clear lake, sometimes slowly and sometimes fast. It was as if the dance was a dynamic physical expression of the surge of the blissful ocean of Brahman, which the Master was experiencing within. As he danced this way, sometimes he lost outward consciousness and sometimes his cloth fell. When that happened, someone would fasten it tightly around his waist. Again, if he saw someone lose

normal consciousness, imbued with spiritual emotions, he would touch that person's chest and bring him back to consciousness.

We felt a current of divine bliss emanating from the Master and spreading in all directions, making it possible for the devotees to see God face to face. It enabled those of lukewarm disposition to intensify their fervour, those with idle minds to go forward with enthusiasm in the realm of spirituality, and those who were attached, to become, for a while, free from their attachment. The waves of his divine emotion caught others and overwhelmed them. Charged by his purity, their minds ascended to an unknown high spiritual realm. On that day Vijay Krishna Goswami and some Brahmo devotees experienced ecstasy and from time to time lost outer consciousness. Chiranjiv Sharma, accompanied by a one-stringed instrument, sang with his sweet voice, "Dance, O Children of the Blissful Mother, round and round." He also was beside himself. Thus the kirtan continued for more than two hours.

Afterwards the Master told all of us that one could attain supreme peace if one could raise the mind from sense objects to God. The women devotees, who were seated in the eastern part of the parlour behind a screen, also asked him various questions on spiritual matters and enjoyed his inspiring replies. While answering their questions, the Master now and then sang a few songs in praise of the Divine Mother composed by Ramprasad and Kamalakanta, in order to impress the subject deeply on their minds.

While the Master was singing the Mother's name, Vijay Krishna Goswami went to another room with a few devotees and began to expound the Ramayana by Tulasidasa. When it was time for the evening prayer, Vijay returned to the parlour to bow down to the Master before beginning the prayer. Seeing him, the Master joked: "Nowadays Vijay feels great delight in kirtan. But I am scared when he dances, for the whole roof may collapse!" *(*All laughed.) "Yes, such a thing actually happened in our part of the'country. There people build two-storied houses out of wood and mud. A Vaishnava teacher went to a disciple's house and began kirtan on the upper floor. When the singing reached the right mood, people began to dance. Now that teacher was a little plump like you *(pointing to Vijay).* After he danced for a while, the floor collapsed, and the teacher fell through to the ground floor! That is why I am afraid that your dancing might repeat the same scene!" (All laughed.)

Noticing Vijay's ochre cloth, the Master said: "Nowadays Vijay is very fond of the ochre colour. Generally people dye their cloths and chadars ochre, but Vijay even dyes his shirt and shoes. That is good. A state comes when one wishes to do so, and he does not wear clothes of any other colour. The ochre colour is indeed the mark of renunciation. It reminds the aspirant that he has

renounced everything for God.” Vijay then bowed down to the Master, who blessed him heartily, saying: “Peace! Peace! Peace be unto you.”

When the Master was singing the Mother’s name, another thing happened. It shows how keen was his power of observation, though he always remained in an indrawn state. While singing, the Master looked at Baburam and immediately realized that he was hungry and thirsty. The Master knew that Baburam would not eat before him, so he asked for some sweets and water for himself. He then took a little and gave the rest to Baburam and other devotees.

Vijay began his evening prayer downstairs, and the Master was taken to the inner apartment for supper. It was nine o’clock. Meanwhile we came downstairs to attend Vijay’s prayer. After some time the Master also joined the prayer and sat there for fifteen minutes. About ten o’clock the Master asked for a carriage so he could return to Dakshineswar. He then put on his socks, coat, and the cap that covered his ears in order to protect himself from the cold. He slowly got into the carriage with Baburam and others, and we left for home.

Sri Ramakrishna’s Method of Teaching

Although we had had the good fortune of meeting the Master only very recently, we felt a tremendous attraction for his fascinating teachings from the very first day. Of course we did not then understand the reason for it. Now we realize how unique his method of teaching was. There was no parade of scholarship, no logic-chopping, no festooning of fine phrases. Neither was there any studied artificiality in the use of words—any attempt to bolster commonplace ideas by clothing them in pompous words, or to obscure profound thoughts by using very few words, as was done by the Indian writers of philosophic aphorisms [i.e., the sutra literature]. We cannot say whether the Master, who was the living embodiment of the ideas he expressed, paid any attention at all to the language he used. But whoever even once heard him speak must have noticed how he held before them picture after picture drawn from incidents of daily life, from the things and experiences the audience was likely to be familiar with,In order to imprint these ideas on their minds. The listeners also became freed from doubts, and were fully convinced of the truth of his words, as if they saw them enacted before their very eyes.

On wondering how these pictures could immediately come to his mind, we point out that the cause lies in his extraordinary memory, his wonderful comprehension, his keen power of observation, and his unique presence of mind. But the Master always said that the Divine Mother’s grace was the only cause of it. He used to say: “Mother sits in the heart of him who entirely depends on her,

and she makes him say whatever he has to say by showing it to him through unmistakable signs. Mother keeps his mind filled with a stock of knowledge which she continually supplies from her never-failing store of wisdom, whenever it appears to run short. Thus it never gets exhausted, however much he may spend from it." Explaining this fact one day, he mentioned the following event:

There was a government magazine to the north of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar where some Sikh soldiers lived in order to guard it. All of them were very devoted to the Master, and sometimes they would take him to their quarters and have him clear their doubts on various religious matters. The Master said: "One day they asked, 'How should a person live in the world so that he may realize God?' I immediately saw before my eyes a picture of a husking machine. Paddy was being husked and one person was carefully pushing the paddy into the mortar where the pestle was falling. As soon as I saw it, I realized that Mother was explaining to me that one should live in the world as cautiously as that. Just as the person who sits near the mortar and pushes the paddy is always careful that the pestle does not fall on his hand, so a person engaged in worldly activities should always take care that he does not get entangled in them, by being conscious that the worldly affairs are not his. It is only then that he can escape bondage without being hurt and lost. As soon as I saw the picture of the husking machine, Mother raised this idea in my mind, and I then told it to the soldiers. They were highly pleased to hear it. Such pictures come before me when I talk to people."

Another characteristic was observed in the Master's method of teaching: He never confused an inquirer by speaking unnecessary words. He used to carefully discern the subject and the aim of the person's question and then answer it in a few conclusive sentences. Furthermore, in order to convince that person, the Master would present illustrations in the aforesaid manner. His "statement of conclusion" was the special characteristic of his method of teaching. He would state as an answer only that which he knew to be true in his heart of hearts. He would not say that no other solution of the problem was possible. Nevertheless, that impression would be firmly imprinted in the mind of the hearer because of the Master's deep-seated conviction and the stress he laid on his expressions. If, on account of education and past impressions, a person brought forward contrary reasons and arguments and would not accept his conclusions, which the Master knew by experience to be true, the Master would wind up the topic, saying: "I have said whatever came to my mind. Now you take whatever you like, discarding the head and tail." Thus, he never tried to disturb a person's understanding by interfering with his freedom. Was it that he thought the hearer would not accept the true solution of the subject under discussion until he had

reached a higher mental state by the will of God? It seems so. Again, the Blaster did not stop there but reinforced his statements by interspersing them with songs composed by well-known saints and sometimes by quoting examples from the scriptures. Needless to say, it would remove the inquirer's doubts about the conclusion of the truth, and being convinced, he would start to mould his life accordingly.

It is necessary to say one thing more. The Master told us again and again that ultimately the aspirant attains nondual knowledge by realizing his identity with the object of his worship, whether he treads the path of devotion or knowledge. As proof of this, the Master's sayings are cited: "Pure devotion and pure knowledge are the same thing." "There (*in the ultimate state)* all jackals howl alike (*all knowers of God speak of the same realization).*" Thus, although he was of the opinion that nondual knowledge was the Ultimate Truth, he always instructed people living in the world on the teachings of qualified nondualism *(which teaches that all living creatures and matter are parts of Brahman),* and also how to love God in a dualistic way. He felt disgusted with those people who had no high spiritual experience nor intense love for God, and yet held forth, with high-sounding words, on the philosophies of nondualism and qualified nondualism. He did not hesitate to condemn such behaviour in harsh words. One day the Master asked our friend Vaikuntha Nath Sanyal whether he had read the *Panchadashi* and other such books. Receiving a negative reply, the Master said with relief: "It is good that you have not. Some boys read those books and, giving themselves airs, come here. They do not practise anything. They simply come to argue. It is a torment to me."

How Sri Ramakrishna Tested His Disciples

We always found that when a person first came to him, he would look at him with special attention. If he felt attracted towards the visitor, he would talk about spiritual things with him and ask that person to visit him occasionally. As days passed and the visits continued, Sri Ramakrishna would observe, unknown to the visitor himself, the shape of his body and limbs, the nature of his thoughts, the intensity of his carnal desires, and the extent of his love for the Master. From these minute observations, he would arrive at a sure conclusion about his latent spirituality, and before long he would have a firm grasp of the person's character. And if he felt the necessity of knowing any hidden facts about the person's inner nature, he would learn about them through his keen yogic vision. About this he once said to us: "During the early hours of the morning, while awake and alone, I think of your spiritual welfare. The Divine Mother shows me how far one has

advanced on the spiritual path, why another cannot progress, and so on." From this, however, let us not conclude that his yogic power was active only at that time. From his conversations at other times we understood that he could ascend at will to high states of spiritual consciousness and obtain similar visions. For he said, "Just as by merely looking at a glass case one can see all of its contents, so I can know the inmost thoughts, tendencies, and everything of a person by merely looking at him."

The above, however, was only his general method of judging character. In the case of his special devotees, he used to apply other methods also. In fact, their case was special in various senses. His first meetings with them always came about in a peculiar manner. He was generally in an exalted mood at those times. And he would intuitively know their natures — the facts of their inner life would be spontaneously revealed to him. The explanation is simple: By wonderful spiritual practices, he had made his body and mind excellent instruments for retaining and communicating subtle spiritual forces. Thus, whenever any devotee approached him, the Master's mind would *be* at once coloured by the same spiritual outlook as that person's, and he could automatically respond to that spiritual level. The facts of the person's inner life would become instantly clear to the Master. This, it must be admitted, was a special method. It was an intuitive process. But, as we have said, he also applied the general methods, the methods of observation, to his special devotees, and these can be described under the following four categories:

1. Sri Ramakrishna would ascertain the predominant tendencies of his devotees by observing their physiognomy and other bodily signs. Physiology and psychology now prove that every definite thought, when it becomes active, leaves an impression on the brain and the body. The Vedas and other scriptures have always affirmed this fact. All Hindu philosophical and religious books declare that the mind builds the body, and that a person's physical form changes accordingly as his thoughts and propensities are good or evil. Therefore many proverbs are current about ascertaining a person's nature from the shape of his body and limbs. And that is also why on the occasions of marriage, initiation, and other ceremonies, an examination of the hands, feet, and other parts of the persons concerned is considered necessary.

It is no wonder that Sri Ramakrishna, believing as he did in the scriptures, should examine the shape of the body and the limbs of his 'disciples. He would relate many facts about this in the course of conversation. And we would listen wonder-struck to his descriptions of the various limbs and features of a person as he compared their shape with the objects of everyday life and explained their special significance. About the eyes he would say: "Some have eyes like lotus

petals, some like a bull's eyes, and some possess the eyes of a yogi or a deva (god). Those who have eyes like lotus petals are endowed with good and spiritual tendencies. Those whose eyes are like a bull's have a strong sex drive. The yogi's eyes have an upward look and a reddish tinge. The divine eye is not very large but is long and stretches to the ear. If a man glances to the side or looks from the corner of the eye while talking, know him to be more intelligent than the average person."

Or he would speak of the peculiarities of the body: "Those who have a devotional temperament have a naturally soft body, and the joints of their hands and feet are supple. And even if their body is lean, the muscles and tendons are so shaped that it does not appear as angular." In order to ascertain the tendency of a person's mind, whether it was towards good or evil, he would weigh the person's hand from the fingers to the elbow in his own hand. If he found the weight less than usual, he would conclude that the mind was towards good. We will cite an example. While Sri Ramakrishna was staying at the Cossipore garden, suffering from cancer, the younger brother of the present writer came one day to visit the Master. The Master was very pleased to see him. He made him sit near him, questioned him about various things, and gave him many spiritual instructions. When I came in to see Sri Ramakrishna, he asked me: "Is this your younger brother? He is a fine boy and more intelligent than you. Let me see if he has good or bad tendencies." So saying, he took my brother's hand into his own and weighing it said, "Yes, he has good tendencies." He then asked: "Shall I draw him (that is, draw his mind away from the world and turn it towards God)? What do you say?" I replied, "Yes, sir, please do so." But Sri Ramakrishna thought for a while and said: "No, no more. I have taken one, and if I take this one also, your parents, especially your mother, would be very grieved. I have displeased many a Shakti (woman) in my life. No more now."

The Master used to say: "People having different mental tendencies also have different ways of functioning physiologically, such as sleeping. Experts can find indications of character in these things. For example, all people do not breathe the same way in sleep. A worldly man breathes one way, a man of renunciation another way."

Of women, Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there are two kinds: vidya Shakti, of god-like nature, and avidya Shakti, of asuric nature, or low nature. "Those of godly nature," he said, "eat and sleep little. They do not care for sense enjoyment, they like to talk with their husbands about religious subjects, and they save their husbands from evil thoughts and impure acts by inspiring them with spiritual thoughts. They help their husbands to live a spiritual life so that they (the husbands) may ultimately realize God." But the avidya Shaktis are just

the opposite. “They eat and sleep a lot, and they want their husbands to think of nothing but their happiness. If their husbands talk about religion they become annoyed.”

In this way Sri Ramakrishna told us many things. Once he examined Naren’s body that way. He was very much pleased with the result. He said: “You have all the good marks on your body, only during sleep you breathe heavily. Yogis sav that this indicates a short life.”

2. & 3. The Master’s second and third means of knowing a person’s nature were the observation of his mental tendencies and his attachment to lust and gold as expressed in small, ordinary actions. He would silently watch all those who came to visit him at Dakshineswar. When he had decided to accept someone as his disciple, he would teach him in many ways and would sometimes scold him to correct his defects. After studying a newcomer, he would decide whether he would train him to become a good householder or a monk. First he would ask whether he was married or single and whether he had sufficient means to maintain himself. Or, if that person was going to renounce the world, the Master would ask whether he had anyone to take his place in maintaining his family.

His love went out especially towards young students. He used to say: “Their minds are not yet divided between many interests, such as wife, children, desire for wealth, fame, etc. If they are properly trained, they can give their whole mind to God.” Therefore he loved to instruct them in the spiritual path. He used to say: “The mind is like a packet of mustard seeds. If you once let it be scattered, it is very difficult to gather the seeds again.” Or he would say, “Once a bird is full grown, it is difficult to teach it to say Radha-Krishna.” Or again he would say: “If a cow steps on an unburnt tile the footprint can easily be smoothed over. But when the tile is burnt, the impression cannot be removed.” He would, therefore, question the young boys carefully to learn the natural tendency of their minds—whether towards pravritti, or worldly enjoyment, or towards nivritti, or renunciation. He would train them towards renunciation if he found them fit for it. Through questioning he would also learn whether the boy was unsophisticated and truthful, whether he really practised what he professed, whether he used discrimination or not in all his actions, and how far he could understand the Master’s instructions. All these he would ascertain very carefully.

Once it was the second day of the bright fortnight. We had all retired. The moonlight was beautiful. The flood tide coming in on the Ganga was always a grand sight on such evenings. In rhe middle of the night Sri Ramakrishna called us and said, “Come, come and see the incoming flood tide.” He himself then went to the embankment. Seeing the calm waters of the Ganga rising in huge waves with the tide and splashing against the embankment, he felt as happy as a

boy and began to dance. Now, on getting up, we had to fasten our clothes properly before we could follow him, and that made us a little late. By the time we got to the embankment, the moments of greatest beauty had passed. Only a few were in time to see a part of it. Sri Ramakrishna was absorbed in his own joy. When it was over he turned to us and said, “How did you enjoy it?” Hearing that we had come too late because we had to dress, he said: “You fools. Do you think the tide will wait for you to dress? Why didn’t you leave your cloth behind as I did?”

Sometimes he would ask a disciple if he wanted to marry and earn money. If he replied that he would not marry but would have to enter service for earning money, it would not satisfy the Master, who was a great lover of freedom. He would say: “If you do not marry, why then be the slave of someone all your life? Give your whole heart to God and worship him. Having been born in the world, this should be your highest ambition. If that is not possible, then marry, but make the realization of God your highest goal and always maintain yourself honestly.” Such were Sri Ramakrishna’s views. If, therefore, any disciple whom he considered especially, or even fairly, gifted spiritually, married or entered service to earn money, or worked for fame and wasted his energy, he would take it very much to heart.

One of his young disciples (Swami Niranjanananda) accepted employment to support his mother. When Sri Ramakrishna heard about it, he said, “If it had not been for the fact that you did so for your old mother, I would have never looked at you again.” When another disciple came to Cossipore garden to see Ramakrishna after his marriage, Sri Ramakrishna wept as if he had lost a son. He put his arms around the young man’s neck, and crying, said repeatedly, “Try not to sink in the world forever by forgetting God.”

All scriptures teach that progress in the spiritual path is impossible without sincere faith. Knowing this, some of us would make it a point to believe in everything and every person. But Sri Ramakrishna warned us against that. Though he asked us to travel along the spiritual path with faith, he never asked us to cease discriminating. One should use one’s sense of right and wrong both in the spiritual path and in worldly matters—such, we think, was his view.

Once one of the young disciples (Swami Yogananda) went to a shop and bought an iron pot. He appealed to the religious feeling of the shopkeeper and did not examine the pot closely. Afterwards he found that the pot leaked. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him and said: “Because you are a devotee of God, does that mean that you should be a fool? Do you think a shopkeeper opens a shop to practise religion? Why did you not examine the pot before you purchased it? Never act so foolishly again. When you go out shopping, first determine the

usual price of the item by going around to several shops and then thoroughly examine the thing you want to buy. And do not fail to demand the little extras where allowed."

Sometimes some persons, having begun the practice of religion, become so kindhearted that their kindness itself becomes a bondage to them and even drags them down from the path of spirituality. Such is often the case with softhearted persons. Sri Ramakrishna would instruct such people to be firm and resolved. But those who were by nature domineering and harsh, he would ask to be gentle. Swami Yogananda was of a very mild nature. We never saw him get angry or abuse anyone, even when there was reason enough for it. Though it was quite against his nature and inclinations, because of his tender heart he suddenly got married. His mother entreated him, and seeing her weep he did not have the strength to refuse. It was—only through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna that he was saved from a fife of bitter disappointment and repentance. Sri Ramakrishna watched over him with great care and tried in every way to cure his excessive mildness. Otherwise, later in more serious matters also you will follow your own judgment and come to grief."

Swami Niranjanananda was of a rough and ready temper. Once while he was going to Dakshineswar in a rowboat some fellow passengers spoke ill of Sri Ramakrishna. At first Swami Niranjanananda protested vehemently. But when they continued their slandering talk, he became very angry. He was so angry that he threatened to upset the boat and drown them all. He was a strong man and a good swimmer. They all got frightened and to save themselves began to pacify him in many ways. Then he calmed down.

When Sri Ramakrishna heard about it he scolded Swami Niranjanananda, saying: "Anger is like a pariah—an untouchable. You should never yield to it. The anger of a good man disappears like a line drawn in the water. Mean people will say many things, and if you want to quarrel about that, you will pass your whole life quarreling. You should think in such cases: 'What are people? They are like worms.' Pity them and overlook their weakness. Think of what an awful deed you were about to do through your anger. What was the fault of the boatmen that you should have put them also in danger?"

He would train his women disciples similarly. Once he said to one of them who was particularly softhearted: "Suppose someone you know takes great pains to help you on all occasions, but you feel that it is because he is under the spell of your beauty, which he is too weak to break. Would you be kind to the man? Wouldn't you, on the other hand, deal a hard kick to his chest and stay away from him? So you see, you cannot always be kind to all persons under all conditions. There must be a limit, and you must discriminate."

4. He was never satisfied with merely knowing the character of his disciples; he would also try to remedy their defects. And he would often inquire about their spiritual progress. In order to ascertain it, he always adopted a special means, which was his fourth method in examining his disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna would often inquire if the regard and devotion for him, which had first brought his disciples to him, were increasing or not. This inquiry would take the following forms: He would sometimes question his disciples about how far they could understand his spiritual conditions and conduct. Or he would observe if they put complete faith in his words. Or he would introduce them to other disciples, an intimacy with whom, he thought, would deepen their own spiritual moods. And he would not be finally certain of the spiritual future of a disciple until he had learned to accept Sri Ramakrishna, intuitively and of his own accord, as the expression of the highest spiritual ideal of the world.

This may astonish some, but a little thought will indicate that it was only reasonable and natural. For what else could he do, knowing as he did that there was an unprecedented influx of spirituality through him? He had gone through long and superhuman austerity and meditation and had attained samadhi. As a result, all his egoism had been totally destroyed, and all chance of any delusion or error had been eliminated forever. Necessarily, therefore, the complete memory of his past and omniscience was revived in him. He felt in his inmost soul that the spiritual ideal that was manifested through his mind and body had never before been witnessed in the world, and he naturally concluded that whoever would, in this age and with full understanding, seek to mould his life in the light of the ideal that was embodied in him, would find his spiritual progress easy and smooth. Need we wonder that he inquired of his disciples if they understood him to be the highest spiritual ideal, and if they were trying to build their lives in accordance with it?

Yogin, who afterwards became Swami Yogananda, was one of the principal disciples of the Master. His home was very near the Dakshineswar temple, and he could, therefore, pass long hours in the company of the Master. One evening Yogin, with the Master’s permission, decided to spend the night with him in order to serve him in case of need. They went to bed. About midnight Yogin suddenly woke up to find the door of the room open and Sri Ramakrishna missing. At first he thought he might be taking a walk outside, but he did not find him there. Suddenly a suspicion flitted across his mind: Could he have gone to meet his wife, thus acting contrary to what he professed? Unpleasant though it was, he resolved to ascertain the truth and watched the door of the concert room where Holy Mother lived. Suddenly he heard the sound of slippers coming from the direction of the Panchavati. A moment later Sri Ramakrishna stood by his

side. “Well, what do you want here?” he asked. Yogin hung his head in shame for having doubted the Master’s sincerity and could not utter a word. The Master understood the whole thing in a moment and reassured the penitent boy, saying: “Well done! You must examine a sadhu by day and by night and then believe in him.” Though forgiven, Yogin could not sleep anymore that night.

In conclusion, we may briefly delineate how Sri Ramakrishna examined Narendra and what conclusions he formed about him. Sri Ramakrishna carefully observed all of Narendra’s actions and movements from the time of his first visit to Dakshineswar. From this he came to feel that spiritual earnestness, courage, self-restraint, heroism, self-sacrifice for noble causes, and similar other noble qualities existed in a developed form in him. He understood that noble qualities were naturally so predominant in Narendra that even under adverse circumstances and temptations he would never succumb to them and do anything mean. As regards his devotion to truth, the Master had noted his utter truthfulness. He thus implicitly trusted in whatever Narendra said, and he deeply felt that very soon Narendra would reach a state where nothing but truth would issue from his lips even under confusion, and that whatever casual desires arose in his mind would be fulfilled. He would, therefore, encourage him still further in truthfulness, and say: “Whoever holds to truth in word, thought, and action is blessed by the vision of God who is Truth itself”; and “One who observes truth for twelve years in thought, word, and deed reaches a state in which whatever he resolves comes true.”

We remember a funny incident about Sri Ramakrishna’s faith in Naren’s truthfulness. In the course of conversation Sri Ramakrishna once mentioned that there comes a stage in the life of a devotee when he is like a chataka bird. This bird will drink only rainwater, and that, as it falls from the clouds. So it is always watching the sky in the hope that rain will fall. Devotees in that state depend on God alone to appease the thirst of their heart. As the bird watches the sky, so the devotees always look to God for all their needs. Naren was listening to this. Suddenly he exclaimed: “Sir, though it is the common belief that the chataka bird drinks only rainwater, it is not a fact that it does not take other water. I have seen these birds drink from rivers and ponds.” Sri Ramakrishna said: “Is that so? Do they drink like other birds? Then I am mistaken. If you have seen it, then there is no doubt about it.” But Sri Ramakrishna, simple as a boy, was a little disturbed in mind. He thought, “If I am mistaken in this, then I may also be mistaken in other ways.” It made him very sad.

After a few days Naren called Sri Ramakrishna and said: “Sir, see, a chataka bird is drinking Ganga water.” Sri Ramakrishna rushed out of the room and said: “Where? Where?” When they came near the spot, what did they see but a small-

sized bat. Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said: “You rogue, it is a bat. You have given me so much trouble for nothing. Now I shall be wiser and not believe everything you say.”

It is often seen that men, as soon as they come into the presence of women, become softer than is accounted for by a mere sense of politeness, respect, and appreciation of beauty. This, according to the scriptures, is the result of certain *samskaras* (impressions) hidden deep in the heart. But in Naren we did not find that. Sri Ramakrishna noticed this, and he was therefore convinced that Naren would never forget himself under the spell of feminine beauty. Once Sri. Ramakrishna compared Naren with a well-known devotee who often went into spiritual ecstasy and was thus highly respected by us. He said: “That man gets beside himself on meeting women, but Naren never does. I have watched him carefully. Though he does not say so, I find that he seems rather annoyed when they come. It seems as if he thinks with some disgust, ‘Why are they here?’”

It was characteristic of Naren that though jnana (knowledge) was so strong in him and he was so manly in every respect, still he was very gentle and full of devotion. Sri Ramakrishna often remarked on this, and once he said, looking at Naren’s face: “Could one who is only a dry jnani have such eyes? You have, along with jnana, all the tender feelings of the devotee. You have the strength of a man and the devotion of a woman. Those who have only manly qualities do not have black circles around their nipples. In the great hero Arjuna these marks (black circles around the nipples] were not present.”

Besides the four methods described above, the Master also tested Narendra in other ways. We shall cite two instances: One day he told Narendra that he possessed many supernatural powers and that he would like to transfer them to him. Narendra asked him if they would help him to realize God. When the Master answered in the negative, he sternly refused to have anything to do with them. This reply greatly pleased the Master.

But the other test was more severe. Narendra’s visits to Dakshineswar were always hailed by Sri Ramakrishna with intense joy—so much so that sometimes even a distant sight of Narendra would plunge him into samadhi. But a day came when all this changed. Narendra came, saluted, and sat before him, but there was no response from the Master. The Master talked with others, but not with him. He even turned his face away from him. The whole day passed in this way. In the evening Narendra saluted him and returned home. Several days after this he again went to Dakshineswar. On that day also he met with the same reception. The third and the fourth time also it was the same. Thus passed one month.

Then one day Sri Ramakrishna called him to his side and said, “Tell me, how is it that though I do not speak a word to you, you still continue to come here?”

Narendra replied: “Sir, it is not your words alone that draw me. I love you and want to see you. Therefore I come.” Sri Ramakrishna was highly pleased with this answer. He said: “I was only testing you. I wanted to see if you would stay away when I did not show you love and attention. Only one of your calibre could put up with so much neglect and indifference. Anyone else would have left me long ago and would never have come again.”

SWAMI TURIYANANDA

Swami Turiyananda (1863-1922) was born in Calcutta, and his premo nastic name was Harinath Chattopadhyay. From his boyhood he led an austere life. He met Sri Ramakrishna in his early teens and was regarded by the Master as the embodiment of renunciation as taught in the Gita. In 1887 he joined the Ramakrishna monastery, and afterwards he travelled all over India, practising austerities. He went to America in 1899 to preach Vedanta and established the Shanti Ashrama in Northern California. In 1902 he returned to India and led a contemplative life. His life was an inspiration to all who came in contact with him.

First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna

I first saw Sri Ramakrishna at Dinanath Basu’s house in Baghbazar. That was long, long ago. In those days the Master would frequently go into samadhi. About that time Keshab Chandra Sen had become acquainted with him. Kalinath Basu, Dinanath’s brother, was a follower of Keshab Sen. He happened to see Sri Ramakrishna and was deeply impressed, so he asked his brother Dinanath to bring Sri Ramakrishna to their house. That is how the Master came to visit Baghbazar. We were all young, about thirteen or fourteen years old. People referred to Sri Ramakrishna as the Paramahansa, so they were all talking about the Paramahansa’s visit. Some other boys and I were curious, and we went to see him. We saw a carriage with two men in it stop in front of Dinanath’s house. Immediately people around began to say, “The Paramahansa has come, the Paramahansa has come,” and began moving towards the carriage. First, one of the men in the carriage got down. *(This was Hridayram Mukhopadhyay, Sri Ramakrishna’s nephew)* He was well built, and there was a large vermilion mark on his forehead and a golden amulet tied around his right arm. Looking at him, one felt that he was a strong and very active person. He stood close to the carriage and helped the other person alight. The other man appeared very thin. He had a shirt on, and his cloth was securely tied around his waist. One of his feet was on the step of the carriage, and the other was inside. He was in a semi-

conscious state, and it seemed as if someone quite drunk were being taken out of the carriage. But when he got down, what a wonderful sight! There was an indescribable radiance over his face. I thought: “I have heard from the scriptures about the great sage Shukadeva. Is he the same Shukadeva?” By that time many others had joined them, and they were taken to the second floor of the house. I followed them. When the Paramahansa became a little conscious of the outer world, he opened his eyes and saw a large picture of Mother Kali on the wall. Immediately he saluted her and started to sing in a soul-bewitching manner. It stirred a wave of devotion in all who had gathered there. The song expressed the idea that Kali and Krishna are identical: “O Mother, for Yashoda thou wouldst dance, when she called thee her precious Blue Jewel....” It is impossible to describe the extraordinary feeling this song aroused in everybody. Two or three years later I went to Dakshineswar and saw Sri Ramakrishna in his room.

I have done what a man ought to do. My aim was to live a pure life. I used to read a great deal, eight or nine hours daily. I read many Puranas and then Vedanta, and my mind finally settled on Vedanta. Once the Master jokingly said to me: “Tell me something of Vedanta. Does not Vedanta say that Brahman is true and the world false? Or does it say something else? Then give up the false and take up the truth.” This was a turning point in my life. When I first met Sri Ramakrishna and saw his spiritual moods—his devotion and his samadhi—I knew I had found someone who lived the ideal. I felt as if I had come home at last, and I thought, “If there is anything to be attained in life, it is God.”

Who can know God? If he, out of mercy, lets one know him, only then is it possible. One day the Master made me shed tears by singing this song:

O Kusa and Lava, why are you so proud? If I had not let myself be captured, Could you have captured me?

I was deeply moved. That very day the Master deeply imprinted on my mind the fact that one cannot attain God through self-effort, by performing sadhana (spiritual practice) Only if God reveals himself is it possible to attain him.

Once when I told Sri Ramakrishna that the goal of my life was to attain nirvana (liberation), he reproached me for entertaining such a low ideal.

He said: “Those who seek nirvana are selfish and small-minded. They are full of fear. They are like those parcheesi players who are always eager to reach home. An amateur player, once he sends his piece home, doesn’t like to bring it out again. Such players are unskilled. But an adept player is never afraid of coming out again, if by doing so he gets the opportunity to capture an opponent. Then he rolls the right number and returns home once more. It seems that whenever he rolls the dice, the right number comes up for him. So do not fear.

Play without any fear." I asked, "Does it actually happen?" The Master replied: "Of course it happens. By Mother's grace everything takes place. Mother likes people to play. Take the game of hide-and-seek. *(There is a granny, there is a thief who is blindfolded, and there are children trying to escape being caught by the thief)* The granny likes to have the children run about and make the game go on. She may extend her hand to help a child so he will not be caught by the thief, if she thinks it necessary. Similarly, the Divine Mother is not really pleased with those who seek nirvana, for they want to retire from the game. She wants the game to continue. That is why devotees do not seek nirvana. They say, 'O mind, it is not good to become sugar. I want to eat sugar.'"

The Master told me many times: "What is there in the scriptures? They are like sheets of paper with a shopping list on them. The list is useful only to check off the items once purchased. When you have done that, the list is thrown away. So you should check your knowledge, your devotion, and consult the scriptures to see whether they agree. It is said, 'When you have the knowledge of the Absolute, the scriptures are worth only a straw.'" The Divine Mother had shown Sri Ramakrishna what was in the scriptures, the Puranas, and the Tantric literature. So, though he was an unlettered person, he was able to lower the pride of the pundits. He used to say, "If you get a tiny ray of light from the Divine Mother, it makes all learning pale into insignificance."

Sri Ramakrishna sounded like a,drunkard when he talked to the Divine Mother, saying: "Do not give me the knowledge of Brahman, Mother! I don't want it! I spit on it!" I was an extreme Vedantist at that time, and his words shocked me very much. I thought to myself: "My goodness! What can be greater than the knowledge of Brahman?"

Days in Dakshineswar

Ah, those days at Dakshineswar were like heaven itself! From morning till one o'clock in the afternoon everyone would be busy picking flowers and making other preparations for worship until the poor were fed. In the meantime Sri Ramakrishna would discuss spiritual subjects, and the devoiees would listen to him with rapt attention. Even his fun and jokes were related to God. There was no other topic. Everything culminated in his samadhi (transcendental state of consciousness). After lunch, Sri Ramakrishna would rest for a short period and again would speak on spiritual matters. At vesper time he would go to the temple of Mother Kali and fan her a little. He would become God-intoxicated there and would return to his room reeling in a state of ecstasy. He used to ask those of us who were practising spiritual disciplines under his guidance, "Tell

me, do you feel divine inebriation when you meditate in the mornings and evenings?" At night Sri Ramakrishna slept very little. He used to get up and wake those who were sleeping in his room, saying: "Don't sleep too much! Wake up and meditate!" Again he would lie down a short while, and then rise before dawn and chant the name of the Lord in his inimitable sweet voice. The disciples would sit and meditate in their own way. Now and then the Master would go to them and correct their posture.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "I cannot stand anyone calling me guru. It irritates me. Who is the guru? Satchidananda (God) alone is the guru." The external guru shows the path; the inner guru awakens the spirit. Ordinary men who pose as gurus do not know this and ruin themselves by feeding their egos.

An hour of congregational singing in the company of the Master would fill us with such exuberant joy that we would feel transported, as it were, into an ethereal region. But now, even meditation fails to evoke that celestial bliss, or even a semblance of it. That bliss would stay with us continuously for a week. We used to feel intoxicated, though we did not know why or how. Who would believe it? It is difficult to convince anyone. Yet I must speak out. The ordinary man seeks nirvana because he has suffered. But he does not know the tremendous joy in divine communion.

One day I arrived at Dakshineswar when the Master was having his dinner. A number of bowls containing various cooked items were placed before him. Someone might have thought this an unbecoming luxury, fit only for a rajasic (worldly) life. The Master at once said: "Well, the tendency of my mind is always towards the Infinite. It is by such rajasic devices that I hold it down to the lower planes. Otherwise I could not talk with you." "How strange!" I said to myself on hearing him. "Others seek to attain sattva by overcoming rajas through a rigorous discipline of diet, whereas he has to forcibly check his mind from rising to the sattvic (spiritual) plane!" .

On another day when I went to see Sri Ramakrishna, there were many other visitors. Among them was a great Vedantic scholar. The Master said to him, "Let us hear some Vedanta from you." The scholar with great deference expounded on Vedanta for more than an hour. Sri Ramakrishna was very pleased. The people around were surprised at this, but after eulogizing the scholar, the Master said: "As far as I am concerned, I do not like all those details. There is nothing but my Mother and I. To you, knowledge, knower, and known—the one who meditates, meditation, and the object of meditation—this sort of triple division is very good. But for me, 'Mother and I'—that is all and nothing else." These words, "Mother and I," were said in such a way that it made a very deep

impression on all present. At that moment all ideas of Vedanta paled into insignificance. The Master's "Mother and I" seemed easier, simpler, and more pleasing to the mind than the three divisions of Vedanta. I realized then that "Mother and I" was the ideal attitude to be adopted.

Whatever evil tendencies one may have, one is sure to improve in holy company. When you go to a perfume shop, the scent enters your nostrils, whether you will it or not. Nevertheless, people are not often inclined to associate with holy persons, and few have the capacity to do so. Sri Ramakrishna would talk and the devotees would listen, but their companions would whisper: "Well, let us go. How long are you going to listen?" The devotees, of course, would have no inclination to leave, so their friends would say in exasperation: "You remain here. We shall wait in the boat." Sri Ramakrishna would describe this so beautifully!

Ah, what a fund of humour we found in Sri Ramakrishna! It was unique. One day Keshab Babu was to come to Dakshineswar. Even before the appointed time Sri Ramakrishna put on a red-bordered cloth, covered his body with a good chadar, and with his lips crimson from chewing betel, began to pace the verandah of his room in expectation of Keshab. When Keshab saw him in that state he remarked: "Ah, today you have dressed yourself with extraordinary care. What is the matter?" "Why, today I have to charm Keshab!" replied the Master, smiling. "That's why all this trimming!" At this Keshab began to laugh.

Swamiji also was very humorous. But his humour was nothing compared to Sri Ramakrishna's, which used to create sidesplitting laughter. He would say, "I keep people in the right mood by introducing secular topics now and then." Once a Brahmo devotee referred to Keshab Chandra Sen and Pratap Majumdar, in their very presence, saying that they were like Gauranga and Nityananda. Sri Ramakrishna was nearby. Keshab asked him, "What then are you?" Sri Ramakrishna at once replied, "I am the dust of your feet." At this Keshab said, "He is never to be caught napping."

It was Sri Ramakrishna who taught the Brahmos to salute in the proper fashion. The idea of the Motherhood of God was also his contribution to the Brahmo Samaj.

The Lord is the protector of the humble—their friend and helper. But it is very difficult to be humble. Humility does not come as long as there is any egotism left. Sri Ramakrishna would often tell of a sweeper woman. Her work is the lowest that can be imagined, but no sooner does she put on an ornament than her vanity knows no bounds.

Every word of the Master's was instinctive and carried great power. He used

to snatch the hearts of people, as it were.

The Vedanta practised in some parts of India is rather diluted. “I am Brahman,” they say, and go on doing all sorts of things as if these did not affect them. Discrimination, according to them, is not a sign of knowledge. Once a monk came to live in the Panchavati at Dakshineswar. Gossip went around about his character, and at last it reached the Master’s ears. When he reprimanded the monk, the monk said, “If the world is unreal, are my slips of character alone real?” Sri Ramakrishna replied, “I spit upon such knowledge as yours!” Falsehood should never be allowed to flourish. Knowledge dawns when discrimination is perfect.

How difficult it is to keep the mind above the world! It wants to come down. It is indeed very hard to escape from the grip of desires. As the Master would say, “Even he who has no one to call his own will raise a cat and create attachment.”

While going to visit the Master, as soon as I would enter the gate of the Dakshineswar temple garden, I would feel a throbbing sensation in the heart. Many others would also feel the same way, because the thought of going near a very holy presence would create a sense of awe. When one goes near a holy presence, one’s bad samskaras within begin to tremble. For who was as pure as Sri Ramakrishna? Even the purest among us was insignificant compared with the Master. When any contrary thought would cross my mind, he would at once detect it and say: “Why do you look this way? Perhaps this is the reason.” And to my amazement he would say the correct thing. How fearless is he who can say with a clear conscience that he has done no wrong!

One day at Dakshineswar the Master said to me: “Go to the Panchavati. Some devotees had a picnic there. See if they have left anything behind. If you find anything, bring it here.” I went and found an umbrella in one place, a knife in another place, and some other articles. I gathered them up and took them to the Master. The knife had been borrowed from him. I was just placing it on the shelf when he said: “Where are you putting it? No, not there. Put it underneath this small bedstead. That is where it belongs. You must put everything in its proper place. Suppose I need the knife during the night. If you put it anywhere you please, I will have to go around the room in the dark, stretching out my arms in search of it, wondering where you put it. Is such service a service? No! You do things as you like and thereby only cause trouble. If you want to serve properly, you should completely forget yourself.” Swamiji used to say, “Be ready to attach yourself and detach yourself at any moment!” We take up a job and become attached to it—we cannot detach ourselves from it. But this should not be. Look

at Sri Ramakrishna. Hriday was ordered to leave Dakshineswar. The temple guard came and said to the Master, “You will have to leave this place.” “What do you mean? It is Hriday, not I,” replied Sri Ramakrishna. The man said, “No, my master has ordered that both of you go.” Sri Ramakrishna put on his slippers and moved towards the gate. Trailokya Babu (grandson of Rani Rashmani, the founder of the Dakshineswar temple) saw this from the *kuthi* (mansion), and ran and fell at the Master’s feet, saying: “Sir, why are you going? I have not asked you to leave.” Without speaking a word the Master went back to his room. Imagine! There was not a bit of haughtiness in his renunciation. And how we raise dust over our deeds! Had we been in his place we would surely have given Trailokya Babu a piece of our mind. But the Master said nothing. He was as ready to go away as to return.

The Master used to be shabbily dressed, so much so that one day a man mistook him for a gardener and ordered him to pick a rose for him. The Master did so immediately. Some time later the man learned about his mistake and stammered out an apology. At this Sri Ramakrishna said that there was nothing wrong in what was done, as one asking for help should be assisted by all means! Isn’t it grand?

Can God be attained by a little cursory study or meditation? One must have intense yearning for the Lord! Life must seem unbearable without seeing him! Sri Ramakrishna said to us: “Because I had that yearning, the Divine Mother took care of all my needs and provided this Kali temple and Mathur Babu (son-in-law of Rani Rashmani and a great devotee who provided for and served the Master).” The heart must burst with longing for God. Then one attains everything.

Sri Ramakrishna used to pray, “Mother, may these children of mine surpass me in spirituality.” There is a saying, “Welcome defeat at the hands of the son or disciple.”

I have meditated much on the teachings of the Gita, which contains the essence of all scriptures. Sri Ramakrishna said that I was a monk according to the precepts of the Gita.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for him there was no mukti (liberation). I heard this from his own lips. Mukti here means nirvana-mukti—that is, upon attaining this liberation, one does not have to be reborn in the world. The jivakotis [ordinary beings], sorely afflicted by the miseries of this world, do not want to be reborn. They seek to escape from these miseries once and for all. That is why they strive for liberation. How is nirvana possible for him who, afflicted by the sufferings of jivas, must repeatedly come to this world? This is why Sri

Ramakrishna said that for him there would be no liberation. Again, Sri Ramakrishna said to Swami Vivekananda, “He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body, but not from the standpoint of your Vedanta.” The point stressed here is that the Advaita school of Vedanta holds jiva and Brahman to be one. Some take this to mean that everyone is equal to Rama and Krishna, and that they (Rama and Krishna) have no distinctive qualities. Lest Swamiji misinterpret the saying, “He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body,” Sri Ramakrishna ! qualified this statement with the words, “not from the standpoint of your Vedanta.” That is to say, the consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna was the consciousness of Ishvara and not that of the jiva. According to Advaita, the jiva can attain the knowledge of his identity with Brahman by removing his ignorance through spiritual practices culminating in samadhi. Yet, despite all imaginable efforts, the jiva can never become Ishvara. He who is Ishvara is eternally the Ishvara. Even when he assumes a human body and appears like a jiva, he remains the same Ishvara and does not become the jiva.

Those who profess to be the children of the Master must have yoga, bhakti, karma, jnana — nay, everything. For Sri Ramakrishna stands for the synthesis and harmony of all religious paths. In the past, the rule was to follow one particular path for spiritual growth. But now one needs an all-round development combined with a magnanimity of heart to love others.

SWAMI ABHEDANANDA

[From: Amar Jivankatha, by Swami Abhedananda (Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta), 1964]

Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1884. His premonastic name was Kali Prasad Chandra. He was very devoted to the Master and served as one of his attendants during his last illness. After the Master’s passing away he became an itinerant monk and travelled to various parts of India. In 1896 Swami Vivekananda asked him to carry on the Vadanta work in England and America, which he did for the next twenty-five years. He returned to India in 1921 and soon afterwards founded the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math to propagate the message of Vedanta in Calcutta. He was a great scholar and wrote many books.

First Meeting with Sri Ramakrishna

My father once told me about a hatha yogi who was immersed in samadhi in the deep forest of Sunderban, near the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Hearing about

him brought a desire to my mind to remain in samadhi by practising yoga, and I became restless to find a guru who could teach me yoga. 1 confided my desire to my classmate Yajneshwar Bhattacharya, who was very fond of me. Yajneshwar told me: “I know a wonderful yogi. His name is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and he lives in Rani Rashmani’s temple garden in Dakshineswar. He has no pretensions. Many respectable people visit him, and he sometimes comes to Calcutta. Perhaps he can fulfill your desire to learn yoga.” My joy knew no bounds when I heard this from Yajneshwar, and I at once resolved to meet Sri Ramakrishna, though I had no idea where Dakshineswar was.

One Sunday morning I started for Dakshineswar by asking directions from people on the street. I crossed the Baghbazar bridge and walked north on the Barrackpore trunk road. It was quite a distance. I then asked a person on the road about the temple garden of Dakshineswar. He told me: “You have gone the wrong way. The Kali temple is on the bank of the Ganga.” At last I reached the temple garden at eleven o’clock. When I asked about Sri Ramakrishna, a temple worker informed me that he had gone to Calcutta that morning. I was exhausted, having walked all that way barefoot in the sun. Disappointed, I sat on the steps of Sri Ramakrishna’s northern verandah and wondered how I could ever go back to Calcutta. I was hungry and thirsty, I was dead tired, I had no money, I had not informed my family as to where I was going, I had no acquaintance in Dakshineswar, and moreover I had no strength to walk back to Calcutta. I began to cry.

Just then another young man arrived and asked me about Sri Ramakrishna, and I told him that he had gone to Calcutta. The young man was also disappointed. We then talked and got acquainted with each other. On inquiry I learned that his name was Shashi (later, Swami Ramakrishnananda). He advised me about my circumstances, saying, “Have a bath in the Ganga, take prasad, and then return to Calcutta after a rest.” Later in the afternoon, when I expressed my intention to return to Calcutta, Shashi told me: “You should not return home without seeing the Master. Is there any certainty that such an opportunity will come again in your lifetime?. Since you have come to see him with so much difficulty, it is better for you to wait.” I knew my parents would be worried about me because I had not told them where I was going. Understanding how I felt, Shashi said to me: “Look, brother, I have also come here without informing my parents. Don’t worry. We shall stay here tonight. The Master will positively return from Calcutta by late evening, as he never stays overnight at any devotee’s house in Calcutta.”

Shashi showed me around and in the evening took me to the Kali temple to attend the vesper service. I felt tremendous peace and joy. Ramlal, the Master’s

nephew, gave us some luchis [fried bread] and sweets for refreshments. We waited on the northern verandah for the Master's arrival. Finally a horse carriage arrived at the northeastern corner of the Master's room, and Shashi and Ramlal went to receive the Master. My heart was beating hard. I stood where I was, motionless. After getting down from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Kali, Kali, Kali," entered his room, and sat on his small cot.

Ramlal and Shashi informed the Master about me while I waited on the verandah. Then Ramlal came out and said that the Master was waiting for me. I entered the room and bowed down to him. The Master asked about me and I told him: "I have a desire to learn yoga. Will you kindly teach me?" The Master kept quiet for a while and then said: "It is a good sign that you have a desire to learn yoga at this young age. You were a yogi in your previous life. A little was left for perfection. This will be your last birth. Yes, I shall teach you yoga. Rest tonight and come to me again tomorrow morning."

The next morning Ramlal told me the Master was waiting to see me.Entering his room I bowed down to him. He then asked me what I was studying, and I replied, "I am now in the entrance class (i.e., tenth Grade)." "Very good," said the Master. Then he took me to the northern verandah. He asked me to sit on a cot. When I was seated in the lotus posture, the Master asked me to stick out my tongue. As soon as I did that, he wrote a mantram on it with the middle finger of his right hand and advised me to meditate on Kali, the Divine Mother. I did what he said. Gradually I lost outer consciousness and sat in deep meditation. I felt an unspeakable joy within. I don't know how long I stayed in that condition. After some time the Master touched my chest and brought me back to outer consciousness. He then asked me what had happened, and I told him about my blissful experience during meditation. He was very pleased. Afterwards the Master instructed me on meditation and sang these lines of a mystical song:

When will you sleep in the divine chamber With the clean (good) and the unclean (evil)? When these two wives are friendly to each other, Mother Shyama will be within your reach.

The Master further told me to meditate every morning and again at night and to report to him my visions and spiritual experiences. Then the Master asked me to go to the Kali temple and meditate there. When I returned from the temple the Master gave me prasad and asked me to visit him again. He even offered to provide my fare if I could not get it from home. In the meantime a devotee had arrived by carriage from Calcutta to visit the Master, and the Master asked me to return home with that devotee. On my way back home I thought of the Master's overwhelming love and compassion. I arrived home before noon, and my parents were exceedingly happy to see me.

Towards the End of the Journey

At the time of the car festival of Jagannath (July 14,1885) I visited the Master at Balaram Basu's house in Calcutta. Many devotees were present and Vaishnav Charan sang kirtan:

O tongue, always repeat the name of Mother Durga! Who but your Mother Durga will save you in distress? ...

As soon as Sri Ramakrishna heard a line or two of the song he went into samadhi. Then the Master sang, "O Mother, for Yashoda thou wouldst dance when she called thee her precious 'Blue Jewel'..."

In the meantime a small decorated chariot of Lord Jagannath (Krishna) had been brought to the upper verandah, and the Master pulled it along with the devotees. While pulling the chariot the Master sang:

Behold, the two brothers (Gauranga and Nityananda) have come, Who weep while chanting Hari's name....

He sang again:

See how all Nadia [birthplace of Gauranga] is shaking Under the waves of Gauranga's love!

It was a divine sight! The Master sang and danced in ecstasy, and the devotees joined him. Afterwards the Master sat in the big hall and told Pandit Shashadhar: "This is called *bhajanananda,* or the bliss derived from the worship of God. Worldly people enjoy pleasure derived from lust and gold, and devotees attain the bliss of Brahman through the worship of God."

Thus the devotees passed joyful days with the Master. One day when I went to Dakshineswar I learned that the Master had a sore throat. Like a child he was showing his throat to everybody, and he was trying to follow whatever advice was given to him. He was fond of ice cream, and it was a hot summer. A devotee had recently given the Master a large can of ice cream, and the Master had thoroughly enjoyed it, but as a result, a sore in his throat had developed. Moreover, the pain gradually increased, and he could not get any relief from it. He had great difficulty in swallowing, eating, and talking.

One day Golap-ma said to the Master: "Dr. Durga Charan of Calcutta is a reputable physician. Perhaps he can find some remedy for you." Immediately the Master agreed to visit him. That night I stayed at Dakshineswar. Latu and Golap-ma were also there. The next morning the Master, Golap-ma, Latu, and I went to Calcutta by boat. Landing there, we rented a horse carriage and reached the doctor's office at Beadon Square. Out of his mercy the Master asked me to sit next to him, and Golap-ma and Latu sat on the opposite seat.

The doctor examined the Master's throat and prescribed some medications. Then we went to the Ahiritola ghat and rented a boat for Dakshineswar. It was about 1:30 P.M. and none of us had had any food. The Master was hungry. He asked the boatman to anchor the boat at Baranagore ghat and then asked me to buy some sweets from a nearby market. Golap-ma had four pice with her which she gave me. I immediately went to the market and bought some chanar murki .The Master took the packet of sweets from my hand and joyfully ate them all. He then threw the empty packet into the Ganga and drank some water from the river with his hands. He showed his satisfaction. The Master knew that the three of us were hungry, but without sharing any sweets he had eaten everything. It was amazing though that as soon as he showed his satisfaction, our own stomachs felt full. We looked at each other silently. Then the Master smiled and like a boy began to make jokes—continuing all the way to Dakshineswar. We all got out of the boat, and later the three of us discussed among ourselves what had happened and realized that it was a miracle.

Such an event occurred when Krishna was alive and enacted his divine play. When the five Pandavas and their wife Draupadi were living in the forest during their exile, the sage Durvasa went to their cottage with his twelve hundred disciples and asked for food. According to the custom guests had to be fed, for otherwise it would be very inauspicious. Durvasa and his disciples went to the river for a bath, and while they were gone, the helpless Draupadi called on Krishna to come to the rescue. Krishna came and asked Draupadi for some food. There was nothing but a few particles of rice and a little spinach at the bottom of a cooking vessel. Krishna ate this and drank a glass of water and by doing so, filled the stomachs of Durvasa and his disciples. So it is said, "If God is pleased the whole world becomes pleased." That day I realized this truth by observing Sri Ramakrishna's life.

SWAMI AKHANDANANDA

[From: *Smriti Katha, by* Swami Akhandananda (Udbodhan Office, Calcutta), 1937; *Vedanta and the West* (Vedanta Press, Hollywood), no. 113, May-June 1955]

Swami Akhandananda (1864-1937) was born in Calcutta, and his pre-monastic name was Gangadhar Ghatak, When he met Sri Ramakrishna he was a young boy. The Master praised his ascetic habits and attributed them to the spiritual disciplines performed in his past life. Swami Akhandananda travelled with Swami Vivekananda to many places of India and also crossed the Himalayas and went to Tibet. He later became the third president of the

Ramakrishna Order.

It was in the summer of 1883 that I first met Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. I was then in my teens. The Master received me cordially and made me sit beside him. Then he asked, “Have you ever seen me before?” “Yes,” I replied. “I saw you once when I was very young at the house of Dinanath Basu in Calcutta.” Swami Advaitananda was also present. Addressing him, the Master said with a smile: “O Gopal, listen to this! This boy says that he met me when he was very young. This little one had an early boyhood!”

In the afternoon the Master asked me to go to the Panchavati after saluting the deities at the Kali and Vishnu temples. Later in the evening, as I returned to the Master’s room, I heard music being played from the two nahabats (concert towers), and the temple garden was filled with the melodious sound of the vesper bells. The Master’s room was dark, and there was a sweet smell of incense. The Master was seated on his cot, barely visible. He did not have any outer consciousness. As he had asked me to stay overnight at the temple garden, I did. The next morning, when I was about to leave for Calcutta, he said to me with a smile, “Come again on Saturday.”

After a few days I went to Sri Ramakrishna for the second time on a Saturday, and I was again made to stay overnight. In the evening, after the vesper service was over, the Master handed me a mat and asked me to spread it on the western verandah. He took his pillow and sat down on the mat. He then asked me to sit in a comfortable posture and meditate. “It is not good to sit leaning forward or to hold the body too straight,” he said.

That evening the Master initiated me by writing a mantram on my tongue. He then lay down putting his feet on my lap and asked me to give them a little massage. I was quite strong, as I practised wrestling. No sooner had I begun to press his feet than he cried out: “What are you doing? The legs will be crushed! Press them gently.” Immediately I realized how soft and tender the Master’s body was, as if his bones were covered with butter. I was embarrassed, and I asked with some fear, “How then should I massage?” “Pass your hands over them gently,” he replied. “Niranjan (Swami Niranjanananda) also did like you at first.”

After that meeting I visited the Master often, usually arriving in the afternoon, staying overnight, and returning the next morning. Many other disciples would visit the Master, but Harish and Latu (Swami Adbhutananda) lived with him.

Before I went to the Master I used to practise pranayama (breathing exercises) along with my other morning and evening spiritual disciplines. I increased the volume of pranayama so much that my body began to perspire and shiver. I

practised kumbhaka (breath holding) by diving into the Ganga and grabbing a stone. I was fascinated by this play with the prana. As soon as I told the Master what I was doing, he forbade me to practise pranayama, saying that it might cause a fatal disease. He told me: “Repeat the Gayatri mantram every day as much as you can.”

It was a hot summer day, and my face had become red from sunburn. He was very pleased that I had brought a watermelon for him. When I bowed down to him he asked, “Are you planning to return today?” “No, sir,” I replied.

The next morning Sri Ramakrishna asked me to accompany him to the Panchavati, and there he told me to meditate facing the east. He left for a while, and when he came back he set my body straight. He remarked, “You become a bit bent during meditation.” We then returned to his room. After that he asked me to carry a waterpot and go with him to the chandni, the bathing ghat on the Ganga. He had his bath and returned to his room in his wet cloth. Before he put on his fresh cloth he asked me to sprinkle a little Ganga water on it. There was a picture of Mother Kali of Kalighat in his room, which he saluted. Then he ate a little dry prasad of Lord Jagannath arid gave some to me. Standing in front of the picture of Kali, he said several times, “Om Kali.” He then put the palm of his right hand on his chest with the three middle fingertips touching the palm, and he stood there with half-closed eyes for some time. After that he took the offered fruits and sweets that had been sent to him from the Kali and Vishnu temples. He then drank a little bel sherbet and gave me the prasad, after which he sat on his small cot and smoked from a hubble-bubble.

When the food offering was over in the temples the Master took me to the eastern verandah of his room and said: “Go and take the prasad of Mother Kali. It is cooked in Ganga water and is very holy.” I agreed. While walking through the courtyard I looked back and noticed that the Master was watching whether I was going to the kitchen of the Vishnu or Kali temple. I wondered why he had asked me to go to the nonvegetarian kitchen of Kali instead of the vegetarian kitchen of Vishnu. I did what the Master said, but I ate only the vegetarian dishes. I still remember the thick preparation of chana dal [lentils].

When I returned to the Master’s room I found him waiting near the east door with a betel roll in his hand. Giving it to me he said: “Chew it. It is good to chew a couple of betel rolls after meals. It removes bad breath.” Then he said: “Naren eats whatever is given and chews a hundred betel rolls a day. His eyes are large and indrawn. When he walks through the streets of Calcutta he sees the buildings, horses, carriages, and everything as God. His home is at Simla (in central Calcutta). Go and see him one day.”

The next day I went to Swami Vivekananda's house at Simla. He was lying on a bed in his room and studying *Buddha-Gaya*, written by Dr. Rajendralal Mittra. The book was very thick, like a Webster's Dictionary. His room was not very tidy, nor was his bed, but I was quite impressed seeing Swamiji's serene, loving face. I told him, "The Master has asked me to visit you." "Please sit down," he said. He was pleased to hear that I was acquainted with the Master. He talked to me for some time and then said, "Come again."

The next time I visited the Master, he immediately asked me, "Did you visit Naren?" "Yes, sir," I replied. I told him all about my short meeting with Swamiji. "I saw his large, captivating eyes," I said. "He was completely oblivious of his surroundings, as if his mind was not in this world. What you said about him, sir, was true." The Master was very pleased to hear this. He then said, "Visit him frequently and enjoy his company."

Swamiji did not go to see the Master for a long time after his father's death. The Master was very anxious about him and sent for him many times, but Swamiji was not in a mood to go. Probably he stopped coming lest the Master become worried about his financial difficulties. Later, whenever I visited the Master, I usually saw Swamiji, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Abhedananda, or Swami Saradananda.

One day a number of devotees came to see the Master, both men and women, including Yogin-ma, Gauri-ma, and Krishnabhavini. Towards evening, as I was about to return to Calcutta, someone suggested that I walk back with one of the gentlemen. But the Master intervened: "No, no. He is a young boy. How can he keep pace with a tall man who walks with big steps? Let him accompany these ladies." After the vesper service Swami Saradananda and I returned to Calcutta with the ladies in their carriage.

Sometimes I would think: "The Master says that most of my habits, such as taking only self-cooked food, being a vegetarian, practising austerity, chewing myrobalan, and so on, are for old people. If they are not good, why shouldn't I give them up?"

One day I visited the Master and had prasad at the temple. A group of lay devotees came after his noon rest and I spread a mat for them on the floor. One of them asked the Master, "Sir, is it good that these young boys come to you to embrace the monastic life, disregarding the householder's life?" The Master replied: "Look, you only see their present life, and not their previous lives in which they passed through these other stages. For instance,, a man has four sons. One of them, having grown up, says: 'I shall not put oil on my body or eat fish. I shall eat only self-cooked vegetarian food.' The parents try to dissuade him from these habits and even threaten him, but the boy will not give up the path of

renunciation. Yet the other three sons are mad after enjoyment and swallow whatever they get. Look, it is because of the preponderance of the sattva quality that this boy wants to renounce everything before he reaches manhood." Listening to this from the Master, my faith in keeping up my orthodox customs became doubled.

Another day I went to Dakshineswar early in the morning. The Master bathed in the Ganga, ate some prasad, and then lay down for a rest. Part of the eastern verandah of his room was enclosed by a bamboo partition so we could rest and chat. After a while I entered his room and found him sitting on his bed and sweetly singing, "Radha, who wanders joyously in Vrindaban, is ours and we are hers." While singing, his chest became wet with tears, and gradually he went into samadhi. I was dumbfounded, because I had never seen such a wonderful thing as this in my life. The rest of the afternoon we spent in kirtan. Manomohan Mittra, a devotee of the Master, was present on this occasion.

Once I spent a night at Dakshineswar with several other disciples, and the Master had us all sit for meditation. While communing with our Chosen Deities, we often laughed and wept in ecstasy. The pure joy we experienced in those boyhood days cannot be expressed in words. Whenever I approached the Master he would invariably ask me, "Did you shed tears at the time of prayer or meditation?" And one day when I answered yes to this, how happy he was! "Tears of repentance or sorrow flow from the corners of the eyes nearest the nose," he said, "and those of joy from the outer corners of the eyes." Suddenly the Maste asked me, "Do you know how to pray?" Saying this he flung his hands and feet about restlessly—like a little child impatient for its mother.Then he cried out: "Mother dear, grant me knowledge and devotion. I don't want anything else. I can't live without you." While thus teaching us how to pray, he looked just like a small boy. Profuse tears rolled down his chest, and he passed into deep samadhi. I was convinced that the Master did that for my sake.

One day the Master talked about dreams: "One may dream that someone has come and lit a lamp, or that something has caught fire, or that one is calling oneself by one's own name. All these dreams are auspicious—but the last one is the best."

Whoever visited the Master at that time was blessed with various spiritual visions during meditation. People visualized and talked with their Chosen Deity as they sat with half-closed eyes seeing all this, the hairs of my body would stand on end. The eight sattvic signs of spiritual ecstasy in one form or other were visible in almost all the Master's intimate disciples. But Swamiji was exceptionally reserved and never yielded easily to any spiritual mood.

There was another day at Dakshineswar when several unforgettable incidents

took place. I had stayed at night with the Master, and in the morning after visiting the temples I returned to him. He asked me to accompany him to the chandni ghat, where he took his bath. I carried his *kamandalu* (water pot). As we went down the steps of the ghat, I saw the temple manager. He was sitting at the edge of the water with one foot in the Ganga and rubbing the heel of the other foot on the step. The Master went to the other side of the steps and did not even glance at the manager. As he started to bathe, the Master put his foot in the water very carefully and then got in waist-deep, throwing a little water on his head. The respect and reverence he showed while taking his bath was consistent with his saying a few days earlier that the water of the Ganga was divine.

Meanwhile an old brahmin appeared on the steps of the ghat. He looked like he was from a village. Approaching the temple manager, he started asking him questions in a loud voice, such as how much fish do they get from the temple pond, how much money do they receive by selling the fruits and vegetables grown in the temple garden, and so on. The Master overheard all this and looked at the old brahmin out of the corner of his eye with displeasure. After the Master had bathed I followed him back to his room and sprinkled a little Ganga water on his cloth. He then went to the temples and bowed down to the deities, after which he returned to his room and ate a little prasad.

The Master was sitting on his cot enjoying a smoke when the old brahmin appeared at his door and asked, “Is Harish here?” Instead of answering him, the Master said: “Well, you are a brahmin and three-fourths of your life is already over. You have now entered the last part, and yet you do not remember your Chosen Deity even on the banks of the Ganga. Fie on you, that you should inquire at such a sacred place how many fish there are in the pond and what quantities of vegetables and fruits grow in the garden!” The brahmin was evidently not in the least repentant, however, and went away in annoyance. The Master asked me to sprinkle some Ganga water on the place where the old man had stood.

A little later a beggar appeared and asked for some money. The Master called me and, pointing to four pice, asked me to give them to the beggar. When I had done this Sri Ramakrishna said, “Wash your hands with Ganga water.” So I washed my hands with the water in the large earthen jar in a comer of his room. Then he made me stand with him in front of one of the pictures on the wall—that of Kali of the Kalighat temple. He clapped his hands and repeated “Hari, Hari,” making me do the same. This incident indelibly impressed on my mind the idea that *money is rubbish, dirt.* Later in life I wandered fourteen years all over the country as a penniless monk and never touched money. The indifference for it which I cherish even now is the result of that blessed incident.

SWAMI VIJNANANANDA

[From: Satprasange Swami Vijnanananda, by Swami Apurvananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad), 1953; Swami Vijnanananda, by Swami Jagadiswarananda (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad), 1947; Pratyak-shadarshir Smritipate Swami Vijnanananda, by Suresh Chandra Das & Jyotirmay Basu-Roy (General Printers & Publ. Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta), 1976; Udbodhan, vol. 43, no.7,1941; Prabuddha Bharata, 1950-51; Vedanta and the West, no. 112, March-April 1955]

Swami Vijnanananda (1868-1938) met Sri Ramakrishna when he was a boy and later was initiated by the Master. His premonastic name was Hari Prasanna Chattopadhyay. After graduating from college, he became a District Engineer for the Government, but in 1896 he resigned from his job to join the Ramakrishna monastery at Alambazar. Later, Swami Vijnanananda established a monastery at Allahabad and practised spiritual disciplines there. He was a Sanskrit scholar, and translated Devi Bhagavatam *and* Valmiki Ramayana *into English. He was the fourth president of the Ramakrishna Order.*

I first saw Sri Ramakrishna in 1875 at Belgharia (near Dakshineswar) in the garden house of Jaygopal Sen. The Master came to visit Keshab Sen in that retreat house. I was then a little boy. I was playing with my friends and then just by chance saw the Master there. At that time the paths of the garden house were covered with red brick dust. Many people came. The Master was seated in a room. After seeing him, I returned to my home nearby.

I met the Master again in Belgharia when I was studying in class IX or X. One day at about four o'clock in the afternoon, I was playing at Sarada's (Swami Trigunatitananda's) house, when a friend of ours came and asked, "Would you like to visit a Paramahansa?" "Where is he?" we inquired. "At the Dewan's house nearby," he replied. I had no idea what a Paramahansa was. Moreover, I was a little afraid of monks who wore ochre cloth, but we all went to meet him.

As we entered the house of Dewan Govinda Mukhopadhyay, we encountered a wonderful scene. A young man (Swami Vivekananda) was singing a devotional song;, "Jai, Jai Dayamaya, Jai Dayamaya [Victory to the compassionate Lord, Victory to the compassionate Lord]." Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the centre of the group, and another young man (Swami Premananda) was holding him so that he would not fall. The Master was completely oblivious of his surroundings. He wore a white cloth. His face shone with a heavenly lustre and a smile played over his lips. His teeth were visible, and there was such a joyful expression on his face that it seemed as if it would crack — like a cracked melon! His eyes seemed to be gazing at something, and

he appeared to be immersed in an ocean of bliss. I pointed out the Master's blissful expression to my friend Rajen Sarkar, and he agreed, saying, "Yes, you are right."

After a while the Master sang a song in praise of the Divine Mother, composed by Ramprasad: "Is Mother merely a simple woman, born as others are born? ..." He was .still in an ecstatic mood. It seemed to me that he was having a direct vision of the Mother and was singing to her. On this occasion I saw another person in ecstasy. Later I learned that he was Nityagopal. He was seated next to the Master, and his face, eyes, and chest were red from spiritual emotion. The Master sat down and began to speak to Nityagopal in a mysterious language. When the Master was standing, his mood had been like that of the Divine Mother. Now, when he was seated, his mood was like that of Krishna. At that time I observed another amazing thing that would remain in my memory all through my life. I saw that the Master's spinal cord was swollen like a thick rope and that his kundalini power had reached his head. It looked like the hood of a snake moving with joy.

In the evening, after the kirtan, Govinda Babu accompanied the Master, Swamiji, Swami Premananda, and others upstairs for refreshments. We then returned home.

A couple of years passed. I was then a second-year student at St. Xavier's College, Calcutta. Sharat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) and Barada Pal were my classmates. One day (November 26,1883) the three of us decided to visit the Master. We rented a boat and reached Dakshineswar in the afternoon, but the Master was busy. A carriage was waiting to take him to Mani Mallik's house in Calcutta. He called his nephew: "Ramlal, the carriage is ready. Let us go. People are waiting there for us. Hello, driver! Please start." The Master also invited us, saying: "You boys come to Mani Mallik's house. There will be a great festival. Tell the gatekeeper there that you have come to meet the Paramahansa."

We bowed down to the Master and returned to Calcutta by boat. I remember that after attending the festival at Mani Mallik's house, I returned home and my mother scolded me. When she heard that I had gone to see Sri Ramakrishna, she said: "My goodness! You went to that crazy brahmin! He has deranged the brains of three hundred and fifty young men." It was indeed the derangement of brains! Even now my brain is hot. I did not pay any attention to my mother's scolding.

Thus four or five times I visited the Master at Dakshineswar. A few times I also spent the night with him. Once (June 8, 1883) the Master blessed Swami Shivananda when I was there. Swami Shivananda still remembers that episode. On his first meeting, the Master had told him, "You will attain God-realization in

this life.” Swami Shivananda later told me that after meeting the Master, sense pleasures and the world became repulsive to him.

Another day I went in the afternoon to visit the Master at Dakshineswar. Many devotees were seated in his room. After saluting the Master I sat quietly in a corner. The Master was conversing with the devotees seated on his small cot. In physical appearance he was like any other man, but his smile was something divine. I have never seen such a smile in my life. When he smiled, a wave of bliss rolled not only over his face but over his whole body. And that blissful smile would wipe out the worries and troubles of those who looked at him. His voice was so sweet and melodious that one never tired of hearing it. His eyes were keen and bright, and when he would look at a person, it seemed that he was seeing everything inside him.

I felt Sri Ramakrishna’s room vibrating with a tangible atmosphere of peace, and the devotees present seemed to be listening in blissful absorption to the words that poured from the Master’s lips. I don’t recall what he said, but I experienced tremendous joy within. For a long time I sat there, my whole attention concentrated on Sri Ramakrishna. He did not say anything to me, nor did I ask him anything. Then one by one the devotees took their leave, and suddenly I found myself alone with him. The Master was looking at me intently. I thought it was time for me to depart, so I prostrated before him. As I stood up to go, he asked: “Can you wrestle? Come, let me see how well you wrestle!” With these words he stood up, ready to grapple with me. I was surprised at this challenge. I thought to myself, “What kind of holy man is this?” But I replied, “Yes, of course I can wrestle.”

Sri Ramakrishna came closer, smiling. He caught hold of my arms and began to shove me, but I was a strong, muscular young man and I pushed him back to the wall. He was still smiling and holding me with a strong grip. Gradually I felt a sort of electric current coming out of his hands and entering into me. That touch made me completely helpless. I lost all my physical strength. I went into ecstasy, and the hair of my body stood on end. Releasing me, the Master said with a smile, “Well, you are the winner.” With those words, he sat down on his cot again. I was speechless. Wave after wave of bliss engulfed my whole being. I was pondering the fact that the Master had not won physically but his spiritual power had completely subdued me. Some time passed. Then the Master got up from his seat. Patting me gently on the back, he said: “Come here often. It is not enough to come once.” Then he offered me some sweets as prasad, and I returned to Calcutta. For days the spell of that intoxicating joy lingered, and I realized that he had transmitted spiritual power to me.

It is hard to describe Sri Ramakrishna’s fascinating power. He who saw him

once was attracted to him forever. One evening I went to Dakshineswar and expressed to the Master my desire to stay overnight. He gladly gave his consent. There was no good eating arrangement at night in Dakshineswar. Every night some prasad of the Divine Mother would be sent to the Master for his supper, and from that he would eat a little and distribute the remainder among those who stayed with him. The Master's night meal was very small—like a bird's food. He would eat a couple of luchis, a little farina pudding, and some sweets. However, seeing the small quantity of prasad, I was upset. I realized that I would have to fast that night. I was then young with a well-built body and a good appetite. That little bit of prasad was not enough for me. Knowing what was in my mind, the Master asked somebody to bring some chapatis [bread] and vegetable curry for me from the nahabat. Even that amount of food was not sufficient for me, but I ate it and lay down on the floor of the Master's room.

Suddenly at midnight I woke up and saw the Master pacing back and forth in his room. Sometimes he would go to the front verandah, muttering something, or he would chant the names of gods and goddesses while clapping his hands. During the day the Master talked and joked with the devotees, but now, at night, he was so different. I was scared to death. I lay in bed, quietly observing the Master's madness. I could not get back to sleep. Sometimes the Master sang and danced, and sometimes he talked with someone. At last the night passed and I was relieved. In the morning the Master was normal again. I talked to him as usual. As I looked at him, I could not believe that this was the same person who had acted so abnormally the night before. Everything about the Master was mysterious! Outwardly he looked like an ordinary human being, but truly he was a living god. We are fortunate that we came in contact with him, and he, out of mercy, gave us shelter.

When I returned home, my sister asked, "Where did you stay last night?" "At the temple garden of Dakshineswar," I replied. Immediately she exclaimed- "Did you stay with that mad brahmin of Dakshineswar? Don't go to that man again. He is really mad. Very often I go there for a bath in the Ganga. I have seen him and I know about his madness." I listened to her words and smiled.

Sri Ramakrishna was very concerned about our welfare. If any of his disciples did not visit him for a while he would ask someone to inquire about that person. Sharat Maharaj sometimes gave me news about the Master. Once when I had not come for a long time the Master sent for me. I went to Dakshineswar, and that day not too many people were around him. As I entered his room he asked in a complaining but affectionate tone: "Hello, how are you? What is the matter? Why haven't I seen you for so long?" I replied truthfully, "I did not feel like

coming." "That's all right," the Master said, smiling. "But I hope you have continued your practice of meditation." I said, "I try to meditate, sir, but I find I can't."

The Master seemed surprised at my reply and exclaimed: "What do you mean you cannot meditate? Surely you can." He remained silent for a few moments. I was looking at him, waiting for him to say something more. Soon I noticed a change coming over his face and eyes. He looked at me intently. After a little while he said, "Come near me." As I approached the Master, he asked me to stick out my tongue. When I did, he drew a figure on it with his finger. My whole body began to tremble, and I felt an unspeakable bliss within. Then the Master said, "Go to the Panchavati and meditate there." Following his instruction, I slowly moved towards the Panchavati. I walked with difficulty, intoxicated with joy from the Master's touch. Somehow I reached there and sat for meditation. Then I lost all outward consciousness. When I regained my ordinary state of mind, I saw the Master seated by me. He was rubbing my body with his hands. His face shone with a heavenly smile. I was still in an intoxicated mood. He asked me, "Well, how was your meditation?" "It was very good, sir," I replied. Then the Master said, "From now on you will always have deep meditation." He further asked, "Did you have any vision?"

I reported my experience to the Master as faithfully as I could. Then I followed him to his room. I was alone with him. That day he talked to me for a long time and gave me many spiritual instructions. I was overwhelmed by the Master's love and compassion for me. I had not realized before that he had so much feeling for me. Sri Ramakrishna's grace was unbounded.

On that day the Master said to me: "Never get involved with women. Always be careful. Let there be no stain in your character. Never look at a woman, even if she is made out of gold. Do you know why I am saying all this to you? You belong to the Divine Mother, and you will have to do a lot of work for her. A pecked fruit cannot be offered to the Mother.

So I tell you, be careful."

On one occasion I was massaging the Master's feet when a gentleman came to visit him from Konnagar. After he had left, the Master said, "You know, I can see the inside of a man's mind just as I can see the objects inside a glass case." I thought to myself: "Well, then he can also see everything in me. What a dangerous man he is!" But the Master would only speak of the goodness in others, not of their evil deeds or tendencies. In Sri Ramakrishna we found manifest aspects of other Divine Incarnations of the past. Once, standing in his room, the Master said in a serious mood, "In my incarnation as Krishna I played

with the shepherd boys and girls of Vrindaban." I was then a college student, and it was hard for me to believe these words. He knew my doubts and so he began to talk of the deep love the gopis had for Krishna.

The Master said: "The gopis' love was pure, divine love. They were so intoxicated with love that whenever they heard the sound of Krishna's flute, they would rush to him, leaving home, husband, and children. Krishna was a shepherd boy. He did not have any wealth. Still the gopis loved him dearly. They surrendered their bodies, minds, souls, and everything to their beloved Krishna. It is said in the Bhagavatam that Krishna played the *raslila* (the divine sport with the gopis on a full moon night in autumn). At that time his entire energy went to the *sahasrara* (seventh chakra in the crown of the head), and he was immersed in deep samadhi in the realm of light and bliss. And the gopis also had the same experience."

While talking about this divine attraction, the Master suddenly became speechless and lost all outward consciousness. He was deeply absorbed in samadhi. I was also beside myself, thinking about the divine sport of Krishna with the gopis of Vrindaban. The Master created a palpable atmosphere of divine love in the orbit of his power, as Krishna had done in Vrindaban. Since 1 happened to be inside that orbit, my veil of ignorance about the raslila disappeared. For the first time I realized the true significance of Krishna's play with the gopis. When the Master returned to the normal plane of consciousness he smiled sweetly. I kept silent.

Once during my college days when I went to visit the Master at Dakshineswar, I asked him, "Is God with form or without form?" The Master replied: "God is with form as well as without form, and again *he is* beyond both form and formlessness." Then I asked, "If God is all, is this cot also God?" He answered emphatically, "Yes, this cot is God, this glass, this utensil, this wall—everything is God." As he spoke, I experienced an inner transformation and was lifted beyond ordinary consciousness. My heart was illumined, and I saw the light of Brahman everywhere.

After a while I again asked the Master, "If God has become everything, then why do people discriminate during meals, thinking that if their food is touched by a certain person they won't eat?" The Master replied: "Look. When some monks were eating here at Dakshineswar, a prostitute came and ate the leftovers from their leaf plates. She had no discrimination about food. Do you then mean to say that she was a knower of Brahman?" I said, "No, sir, her character was not good." Then the Master said: "So the knowledge of Brahman does not only depend upon nondiscrimination in eating. It depends, upon something else."

Listening to the Master's logical answer, I was dumbfounded. The Master had such a gigantic personality that sometimes I was afraid to be near him. He had all powers. He could fulfill the wishes of others.

Blessed is this country that held in her bosom such a God-man. I am very fortunate that I met him.

The Master was the living embodiment of holiness and purity. People may think I say this because I am his disciple. It is not so. I tell you frankly that I have never seen anyone to compare with the Master. He was always in an ecstatic mood and his nerve current always flowed towards the highest plane.

Even looking at him one could see that he observed people in silent amazement. He would say: "People in this world are entrapped by maya and engrossed with impermanent, mundane things. They are so deluded and attached to momentary pleasures that they turn away from eternal bliss." His spiritual mood was absolutely incomparable.

Our Master was the embodiment of purity. As soon as there was any talk on a spiritual subject, he would immediately go into ecstasy. People of all communities derived great pleasure from his holy company, and they would look upon him as their own. He practised universality. He was not bound by any limitations.

When the Master was blessed for the first time with the vision of the Divine Mother, he thought, "If this vision of mine is true, then let this big stone jump up thrice." What he thought immediately happened, and seeing that, the Master was fully convinced of the genuineness of his vision.

The Master had passionate love for truth. He always kept his word. Whenever the carriage reached Dakshineswar to take him to Calcutta, he would immediately get ready and enter it. Then he would call the driver, who was perhaps smoking. The Master would hurry because devotees in Calcutta were waiting for him, and if he were late they would be worried. When the carriage started, he would be relieved. Once he said, "If one word of mine is untrue, then whatever I have said is untrue." What a great statement! It is something new. Can anybody speak such words if his life is not firmly established in truth?

Once the Master told me, pointing to his own picture: "Look. I dwell in this picture. Meditate on me." "Yes, I will," I told him. All the forms of gods and goddesses are within Sri Ramakrishna's form. His photograph symbolizes the piercing of the six centres of kundalini. When I look at his luminous form, it seems to me that the Master is immersed in the blissful ocean of Satchidananda transcending the six centres of the kundalini. I see many wonderful things in the Master's picture. Sri Ramakrishna manifests himself to those people who are

pure in heart. The last night I stayed at Dakshineswar with the Master was the very night he got his sore throat [cancer]. In the morning he said to his nephew, "Ramlal, I have a pain in my throat." A young boy who was nearby suggested, "Sir, if you apply the juice of the *tejbal* leaf, your pain will subside." The Master immediately believed his words and said to Ramlal: "Look. This boy is suggesting that I apply the juice of tejbal leaf to relieve this pain. Why don't you make some for me?" Ramlal knew the Master's nature. He said, "All right, I will make it right now."

That was my last visit to the Master. Afterwards I went to Bankipur (in Bihar) for my last two years of college. The house where I lived is now an ashrama. The day the Master passed away I saw him standing in front of me. I wondered: "How did the Master come here? What is the cause of this vision?" The next day I read of the Master's passing away in the *Basumati* newspaper.

Once at Dakshineswar the Master said to me: "Do you know why I love you? You boys are my very own. The Divine Mother has asked me to love you." I cannot express how much love the Master had for us. We don't have that capacity to love others. We became intoxicated seeing the Master, and now people are intoxicated just by hearing his name. How blessed they are!

RAM CHANDRA DATTA

[From: Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansadever Jivan Vrittanta, by Ram Chandra Datta (Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Calcutta), 1950; Gurupran Ramchandrer Anudhyan, by Mahendra Nath Datta (Mahendra Publishing Committee, Calcutta), 1958; Mahatma Ramchandrer Vaktritavali, by Ram Chandra Datta (Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Calcutta), vol. I,' 1948; Tattwamanjari (Sri Ramakrishna Yogodyana, Calcutta), vol. 20, Kartik 1323 (1916)]

Ram Chandra Datta (1851-1899) was a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a medical practitioner of Calcutta Medical College. He had great enthusiasm for preaching the message of the Master. Even as early as 1885 he published a book titled Tattwasara *containing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. He also founded the Kankurgachi Yogodyana (a retreat in East Calcutta), where he installed the Master's relics.*

In 1879 (November 13) we (Ram Chandra Datta, Manomohan Mittra, and Gopal Chandra Mittra)went to visit Sri Ramakrishna. We arrived at Dakshineswar at 1:00 P.M. The door of his room was closed, and we were wondering if we should call out to him. Just then someone opened the door.

As soon as we saw him our hearts became calm, but we did not know who he

was. We entered the room, bowed down to him, and sat on the floor. We guessed that he must be Sri Ramakrishna, though he was not wearing an ochre cloth as monks normally do. For that reason many people did not recognize him to be a holy man.

We were rank atheists, but Sri Ramakrishna made us believe in God. His advice did not consist of mere words. Let me tell the story of how I accepted the Master as my guru.

When my first daughter died, the joy I felt in my family life was shattered. Many questions then arose in my mind: Does God exist? Can anyone see God? Is it possible to enjoy the bliss of God? A few days later our hereditary guru came to our house. Seeing him I thought he would be able to answer my questions. When I put my questions to him, however, he said that he did not know the answers, and he even doubted that there was anybody who could answer my questions except Lord Shiva. Listening to this, I was at first very disappointed, but later I thought that perhaps Lord Shiva might be gracious enough to give me a vision. It was after this that I went to the Master and all my questions were answered.

During our first visit we did not ask any questions. As soon as he saw us he began to speak: “Who wants God? Man weeps one jugful of tears for property, two jugfuls of tears for wealth and .money, and ten jugfuls of tears for wife, children, and relatives. But who sheds a teardrop for God? He only finds God who wants him, who sees darkness all around without him, who feels terrible discomfort without him.” These words from the Master solved all our problems. From that moment he captured our hearts.

One day we asked: “Does God exist? How can one see God?” The Master replied: “God really exists. You do not see any stars during the day, but that does not mean that the stars do not exist. There is butter in milk, but can anyone know it by seeing the milk? In order to get butter you must churn the milk in a cool place before sunrise. If you want to catch fish in a pond, you have to learn the art of fishing from those who know it, and then you must sit patiently with a fishing rod, throwing the line into the water. Gradually the fish will grab the bait. Then, as soon as the float sinks, you can pull the fish to shore. Similarly, you cannot realize God by a mere wish. Have faith in the instructions of a holy man. Make your mind like a fishing rod and your prana, or life force, like a hook. Your devotion and japam must be like the bait. Eventually you will be blessed by the vision of God.”

Previously we did not believe in the existence of God. Furthermore, after associating with the Brahmo Samaj we had come to believe that God is formless. The Master read our minds and said: “Yes, God can be seen. Can God, whose

creation is so beautiful and enchanting, be imperceptible?" We said: "Sir, whatever you say is true. Who can refute you? Is it possible to realize God in this life?" The Master replied: "You get what you desire. Faith alone is the key to success." Then he sang a song:

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;
As is a man's feeling of love, so is his gain;
And faith is the root of all.
If in the Nectar Lake of Mother Kali's feet
My mind remains immersed,
Of little use are worship, oblations, or sacrifice.

The Master continued: "The more you advance in one direction, the more you leave behind the opposite direction. If you move ten steps towards the east, you move ten steps away from the west." Then we said: "But one must have tangible proof. Unless we have direct experience of God, how can our weak and doubting minds have faith,in his existence?" The Master replied: " A typhoid patient in a delirious state clamours to take gallons of water and heaps of rice. But the physician pays no heed to those entreaties, nor does he prescribe medicine at the patients's dictation. He knows what he is doing." In spite of listening to the Master's convincing words, our minds were not satisfied.

A few days later I felt tremendous longing for God. One night I dreamed that I took my bath in a familiar pond and the Master came and initiated me with a sacred mantram. He then instructed me, saying, "Repeat this mantram one hundred times every day after your bath." As soon as I woke up I felt that my body was throbbing with bliss. The next morning I rushed to Dakshineswar and related my dream to the Master. Hearing about it, Sri Ramakrishna joyfully said, "He who receives divine blessings in a dream is sure to attain liberation." But due to my Western education, even this assurance from the Master did not convince me. I had learned from Western thinkers that dreams are fantasies of the mind. The Master's words had not removed my doubts, so I kept quiet.

As days passed I felt more and more discontented, and in my confused state of mind I cursed the day I met Sri Ramakrishna. I neither found pleasure in sense enjoyments nor could I definitely ascertain the existence of God. A few days passed this way. Then one morning at 11 o'clock, I was standing near the southwest corner of College Square in Calcutta with a friend. We were talking about our mental unrest. All of a sudden a dark-complexioned man appeared before us and said with a smile: "Why are you so anxious? Have patience." We were taken aback. Who was this man, we wondered, who had read our minds and lifted our spirits? We looked in all directions for the stranger, but he was gone. We were puzzled. It could not have been an illusion, for both of us had

seen and heard him in broad daylight. I took this incident to be a message from God. When I related to the Master what had happened, he said, “Yes, you will see many such things.”

For some time after this incident I felt great tranquility of mind. I began to taste the bliss of God. Sometimes out of ecstasy I would laugh for half an hour, or I would cry so much that tears would wet my cloth. One day I prayed to the Master to be initiated into sannyasa. But Sri Ramakrishna dissuaded me, saying: “Nothing should be done on the spur of the moment. God alone knows what he intends to do through a particular person. Have you not seen that if the mother fish is killed in a pond, her newborn children are eatert by other fish? Similarly, where will your wife and children be if you leave the world? You must not try to upset the arrangement God has made for you. Everything will come in time.”

I considered myself to be an advanced soul, and I felt that renunciation was the summum bonum of spiritual life. Consequently, a few days later I again approached the Master about becoming a monk. This time he said sternly: “What will you gain by renouncing the world? Living a family life is like living inside a fort. It is easier to fight an enemy from inside a fort than from outside. You will be in a position to renounce the world when you can put three-fourths of your mind on God, but not before that.” This time I respectfully accepted the Master’s advice.

For a while I was happy and passed my days in joy. But after some time my mind suddenly became restless again, and I felt an emptiness inside me. Life seemed to be a barren desert. I could not find any way out from that depression. I went to the Master and told him my sad story. But this time the Master behaved differently. He gravely said to me: “What can I do? Everything depends on the will of God.” Surprised, I said: “Sir, all these days I have been looking to you for help. If you treat me like this what shall I do?” But he indignantly replied: “I don’t owe you anything. I should not be blamed. If you like, you may come here. If not, don’t.”

Although I realized that Sri Ramakrishna was standing in front of me like a kalpataru, ready to grant any boon I wanted, I was at a loss to know what to ask for. Finally, overwhelmed with emotion, I said: “Lord, I don’t know what to ask for. You decide for me.” “Give me back the mantram I gave you in that dream.” Saying this, the Master went into samadhi. Immediately my heart overflowed with heavenly bliss. I wondered, “Is this really happening or is it a dream?” Without losing any time, I prostrated before the Master and offered the mantram mentally at his feet like a flower. The Master touched my head with his right foot, and I also lost outer consciousness. Gradually the Master came back to the normal plane of consciousness and took his foot away. Then he said to me, “If

you wish to see anything, look at me." I looked up and saw my Chosen Deity, the object of my meditation, in him. Then he told me: "You do not need to practise any more spiritual disciplines. Just come here and see me now and then, and bring with you a pice worth of something as a present." From that moment I began to live in the realm of peace. I got the taste of divine bliss. I recognized my guru and realized that he and my Chosen Deity were one. I knew the Master to be my all in all.

Hriday served the Master for many years, and as a result he received his uncle's blessings. Gradually, however, he became greedy and possessive. No one could talk to the Master or sit near him without first satisfying Hriday with some gifts. When the Master learned about this situation, he forbade Hriday to continue this behaviour. But Hriday paid no attention and did not change his ways. He spoke rudely to Sri Ramakrishna in public and bullied him into submission over trifles. Hriday even dared to put on airs of great sanctity, imitating the gestures Sri Ramakrishna made when in ecstatic moods, and singing and dancing as the Master did. Thus Hriday became a great nuisance. He began to rule the Master, and the latter could do nothing about it.

Towards the end of May 1881, Trailokya, one of Mathur's sons, arrived at Dakshineswar with his wife and children to take part in the annual festival commemorating the founding of the temple. Hriday went to the temple to perform the worship. Trailokya's ten-year-old daughter was then in the shrine of Kali. Suddenly Hriday felt inspired and began to worship the little girl as the goddess with flowers and sandal paste. He was imitating Sri Ramakrishna, but this act actually brought about his downfall. Later that day Trailokya's wife noticed sandal paste on her daughter's feet and found out what had happened. She began to cry, thinking that this was very inauspicious for her daughter. Trailokya became furious. He immediately ordered his guard to remove Hriday from the temple precincts.

Hriday did not go far, however. He settled down in the garden house of Jadu Mallik, just outside the temple grounds. Sri Ramakrishna used to visit him now and then, and he regularly sent him food from his own share. For a while Hriday kept trying to persuade the Master to leave Dakshineswar and go with him in search of another Kali temple where they could be together again. But the Master always refused. One day he said to Hriday, "Do you want to hawk me from door to door like a curio?"

Once three girls in my family died from cholera, and as a result I could not visit the Master the following Sunday. The Master told the Calcutta devotees: "Something terrible has happened in Ram's family. Please go and visit him." That night the devotees came to my house and informed me that the Master was

very worried about me. I sent a messenger to the Master the next day with details of what had happened. The following Sunday, when I went to visit him, I saw that he was more grief-stricken than I.

The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna began observing the Master's birthday with an annual festival at Dakshineswar. Devotees would begin to assemble there in the morning. Trailokya and the temple staff would help in coordinating the function. At 10 o'clock in the morning the Master would take his bath and then put on a new cloth. The singers would then start kirtan and the Master would join them, improvising words now and then. This brought life to the singing as well as to the gathering.

The devotees could not restrain themselves when the Master was in ecstasy. They also became overwhelmed with spiritual emotion. It was contagious. When the Master lost outer consciousness, the devotees would put white sandal paste on his forehead and feet and a garland around his neck. At such times he would look beautiful! We would gaze in awe at his wonderful form in samadhi. Some devotees would sing and dance around the Master. Then after regaining outer consciousness, the Master would throw away the garland and wipe off the sandal paste, because these were signs of rajas, which he could not bear. Later he would eat with the devotees.

Sri Ramakrishna was very compassionate to the poor, destitute, and dejected. One year, on his birthday celebration, a poor woman devotee of Calcutta brought four rasogollas for him and gave them to Holy Mother at the nahabat. Other women devotees were also present there, and they told her: "The Master is now busy with the devotees. How can Holy Mother carry these sweets to him? Moreover, the Master has already finished his meal. He won't eat anything more now. If he does, he will be sick." These words pierced the heart of that poor woman, and tears came to her eyes. She mentally cried to him: "Master, you are the Lord of the poor and the lowly. Your rich devotees have arranged this festival spending a lot of money, and you are in a festive mood with them. I am a poor, simple woman. Somehow I managed to save four pice, and with that I bought these sweets for you.

I don't know what to do! I am helpless. Now I feel that you are not the Lord of the poor."

The Master was omniscient. He felt that someone was pulling him, and he immediately left the gathering, went to the nahabat, and ate the sweets that the poor woman had brought for him.

M. (MAHENDRA NATH GUPTA)

From: Srima Darshan, by Swami Nityatmananda (General Printers & Publ. Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta), vols. I-XVI, 1967-77; The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, tr. by Swami Nikhilananda (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York), 1969/-Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta), 1955.(Srima Darshan, I. 36; The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pp. 718-19; S. D., I. 13; Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Advaita Ashrama, p. 424; S. D., XIV. 290, VI. 104-06, IX. 147-52, VI. 118-19,1. [Introduction], pp. 11-12)

M. was the pen name of Mahendra Nath Gupta (1854-1932), the headmaster ofVidyasagar's High School in Calcutta. M. met Sri Ramakrishna in 1882 and recorded in his diary many of the Master's conversations and teachings until the latter's passing away in 1886. Excerpts from this diary were first published in Bengali in five volumes under the title Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita. *In 1942 Swami Nikhilananda translated this into English and combined the five volumes into one, entitled* The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. *In his later life M. was surrounded by devotees, and his conversations with them about Sri Ramakrishna and spiritual life were recorded by Swami Nityatmananda from 1923 to 1932. These conversations were published in Bengali in sixteen volumes under the title* Srima Darshan. *The following reminiscences have been translated from those volumes.*

My First Meeting with Sri Ramakrishna

What a great event it was when I first met Sri Ramakrishna. At that time I could not get along with my father and brothers at home. Though I tried my best to serve them, they mistreated me very much. Unable to bear the mental agony any longer, I decided to leave home and commit suicide. One night at ten o'clock I left with my wife in a hired carriage. I asked the driver to take us to Baranagore, where my sister lived, but on the way, near Shyambazar, a wheel of the carriage came off. We then went to a friend's house and got a cold reception. He thought we wanted to stay at his house overnight. Finally I was able to get another carriage, and we reached Baranagore at midnight.

The next afternoon I went for a walk with my nephew Sidhu, and we visited several gardens on the bank of the Ganga. Feeling tired and depressed, I sat down in a garden. Sidhu then said: "Uncle, let us go to Rashmani's garden. A holy man lives there." We entered through the main gate of the temple garden at Dakshineswar. It was half an hour before sunset.

Having a poetic mind, I was deeply impressed with the beautiful flower garden. I picked some flowers and was overwhelmed by their fragrance. After some time we entered Sri Ramakrishna's room.

The Master was seated on his small cot and the devotees were on the floor. I didn't know any of them. The first thing I heard from the Master's lips was:

“When, hearing the name of God once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform any more karma.”

My Ego Was Crushed

During my second visit to the Master he asked me, “Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?” I had a tendency to argue on religious matters. I answered, “Sir, I like to think of God as formless.” And I further said: “It is meaningless to worship a clay image. One should explain to those who worship a clay image that it is not God, and that while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image.” At that time there were so many lectures on this topic in Calcutta. But the Master immediately silenced me by saying: “That’s the one hobby of you Calcutta people —giving lectures and bringing others to the light. Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others?” He continued: “You will not have to rack your brain on this matter. Look at the world—how it moves in an orderly way. It is God who sends the sun to shed light, the rain to give water, and the seasons to rotate. The earth produces the crops which help mankind to survive. God arranged everything for us. Look at the spiritual world. You can see temples and holy places all around the country. He created the scriptures and the holy people. These he arranged for people who want to lead a spiritual life. He thinks about everyone. We do not have to think of anything.” Listening to this, I was speechless. My inclination for argument stopped forever. I realized that the Lord is the doer and we are his instruments.

My Family Trouble Was a Blessing

Seven or eight days after my first meeting with the Master, he was walking through the courtyard of the Kali temple and I said to him, “It is better to take one’s life than to suffer such terrible pain.” At once he replied: “Why do you say so? You have a guru. Why do you worry? Your guru is always behind you. He can remove your suffering by a mere wish. He makes everything favourable. A juggler threw a rope with many knots in it in front of a thousand people, and none could untie a single knot. But the juggler immediately removed all the knots just by a jerk of his hand. Don’t worry. The guru will remove all your obstacles.” What agony I was suffering, but I had found the Master. How he guided my life! Later my father came. We were reconciled with love and affection, and he took me back home. In retrospect we see that God is all-auspicious, but we judge things superficially. It was my family problems and my

desire to commit suicide that led me to God.

The Master Talked with God

Before I met the Master I had been connected with the Brahmo Samaj for seven or eight years. During their formal service they would talk about God, and as I listened to their sermons, I would think that God was far away. But when I went to the Master, I saw that he would talk *with* God. What a great ideal the Master presented before us! He said, “The goal of human life is to realize God.” Without that, life is meaningless. He not only saw God—he used to talk to the Divine Mother, as we talk among ourselves, in front of people. One day he said, “The Mother has come.” Then he began to talk to her, saying: “Well, Mother, to whom should I listen? This person is saying this and the other person something else.” Then the Divine Mother said something to him. Again the Master said: “I understand, Mother. I shall listen to you and no one else.” At the beginning of his years of sadhana he would cry to the Divine Mother: “Mother, I cannot bear these worldly people. My body is burning.” The Mother said to him: “Wait for some time. The pure-souled devotees will come.” The Master had to wait nearly twenty-two years for his devotees.

From the Infinite to the Finite

When the Master was going to Vidyasagar’s house he asked me: “My shirt is unbuttoned. Will that offend Vidyasagar?” I assured him: “Oh, no! Don’t be anxious about it. Nothing about you will be offensive.”

What a wonderful person the Master was! A few minutes earlier in the carriage he had been in samadhi, and when he alighted he was still absorbed in that mood, so his steps were faltering. But still he was quite aware of social formalities, such as the condition of his clothes. What a fantastic mind he had! At that time two opposite ideas were harmonized in his behaviour. On the one hand his mind had transcended the world and was merged in God, and on the other he was inquiring about human affairs. This should be the ideal: “True to the kindred points of heaven and earth.” This we find in the lives of the avatars [incarnations]. The avatar brings the message of the Infinite to the finite world.

We Watched the Master Twenty-Four Hours a Day

The Master was in such a state that he could accept things only after offering them to the Divine Mother. If someone presented a new cloth to the Master, he would first offer it to the Mother in the temple and then use it himself. In this way the Master demonstrated how one could be immersed in yoga while living

in this world.

Once the Master was staying at Mathur's Calcutta residence. One morning at two o'clock he suddenly said to Mathur, "I want to go back to Dakshineswar." Mathur said: "Father, where shall I get a carriage now? You can go at daybreak." "If you don't get a carriage now I shall go on foot," said the Master. Mathur was compelled to go to his coachman and ask him to get the carriage ready'and take the Master to Dakshineswar. After arriving at the Kali temple the Master said, "Mother, here I am." The Divine Mother was his all in all.

The Master said, "Gauranga and I are one." One day he was humming and chanting the name "Gaur, Gaur." A person asked, "Sir, why are you saying 'Gaur, Gaur' instead of chanting the Mother's name?" The Master replied: "What can I do? You people have many resources—wife, son, daughter, money, home, and so on—but I have only one resource, God. For that reason I say sometimes 'Gaur,' sometimes 'Mother' sometimes 'Rama, Krishna, Kali, Shiva.' This is the way I spend my time."

The Master experienced the truth of Brahman as described in the scriptures not just once or twice but all the time. We lived with the Master and watched him closely twenty-four hours a day. He never deviated from God-consciousness. Even while lying in bed at night he would chant "Mother, Mother." He had very little sleep. He never slept more than fifteen to thirty minutes at a stretch. Such a thing is not possible for an ordinary God-realized person. Only when God incarnates in a human body is such a thing possible. He declared that in his body Satchidananda had manifested on earth. One day he told me, "Christ, Chaitanya, and I are one and the same entity." Is this the temple priest or God? We were bewildered when his real nature was revealed to us. "The Mother of the Universe," he said, "speaks through my mouth." He spoke out of inspiration. "I am an illiterate man," he said on several occasions, "but the Mother supplies knowledge from behind."

Days in Cossipore

Once when Sri Ramakrishna was ill at the Cossipore garden house, .somebody said to him, "Sir, why don't you go to Dakshineswar?" "Why?" asked the Master. "Because Mother Kali is there," was the reply. "Is not the Mother here?" said the Master.

On the eve of the *holi* festival at Cossipore, the Master touched his heart with the palm of his hand and then made a circle around himself with a finger. He then said to Narendra, "Tell me what I have indicated." Narendra replied, "Sir, the whole universe has emanated from you." The Master was pleased and said to

Rakhal: “Just see. Now he understands me.” Previously Narendra had not accepted the concept of avatar, or Incarnation of God. But now he did, so the Master was happy.

Narendra sang this song at Cossipore:

O Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant!
Thy servant am I! O Lord, thou art my Master, thou art my Master!
My Master art thou!
From thee I have received two pieces of bread and a kaupin; When I sing thy name, devotion wells up in my heart and shields me from harm.
Thou art the Master, the All-compassionate; this I repeat, O Lord! Thy servant Kabir has taken refuge at thy feet.

When the Master heard this song, tears fell from his eyes. Oh, what a sweet voice Narendra had! The Master also had a beautiful, sweet voice. After hearing them, I don’t enjoy anybody else’s singing. Their singing was not only sweet, but sublime and charming. It would raise the mind to a higher level of consciousness and unite it with God. I will never hear such singing again. During the last year of his life, the Master could not sing. Usually Narendra and some devotees would sing and the Master would listen. The frequent bleeding in the Master’s throat reduced his body to a skeleton. By enduring this physical pain, he showed humanity that physical suffering is inevitable when one takes a body, and that there is no escape from it.

At Cossipore the Master’s body was so emaciated that it appeared bent like a bow. Once I was seated near his bed, dejected in mind. Seeing me the Master said: “Why are you seated like that? It is not right. Be strong and gird your loins. Give up this melancholy.”

Once at Cossipore the Master asked me to buy a stone cup. Someone said, “Master, we have a cup.” But he said, “Let him buy another one.” It was noon. Without eating lunch, I went to Jorasanko [in West Calcutta] and returned to Cossipore after purchasing the cup. The Master took the cup in his hands and looked at it. Why did he do this? The Master knew I would remember this incident all through my life and that it would be helpful to me. The remembrance that I had bought a cup for an avatar would inspire my mind and become a living meditation.

Plain Living and High Thinking

About food the Master used to say, “Eat a little rice and spinach and chant God’s name the whole day.” What is the necessity of many dishes, such as meat,

fish, vegetables, and sweets? The focus of those who are earthbound is on external things and worldly enjoyments. On the other hand, those who have some knowledge about spiritual life or have a guru don't need many material things. They should be content with bare necessities and should practise sadhana as long as they live. Once the Master's parental home was being repaired by the Laha family. Seeing that ornamental designs were being put on the door, the Master said: "What is the need for "all those decorations? Just put up a door so that the jackals cannot enter." But who has such insight?

The Master solved various human problems through the example of his own life. Eat simple food and the rest of the time chant the name of *Rama.*When Swami Vivekananda's family was suffering from starvation, the Master blessed him, saying, "You will get rice and lentils—that is, plain food—and nothing more."

A beginner should practise japam and meditation daily at fixed times. Even when busy, he must sit for meditation in the morning and evening. Practice makes everything easy. The Master used to say: "One should get up at four in the morning, if not at three. Four or five hours of sleep is enough. One should think of God early in the morning. Holy people meditate at that time. This is called *Brahma-muhurta*, or the time of Brahman, when a spiritual current flows all around."

One should be careful about one's evening meal. If you eat too much then, you won't be able to get up early. So the Master used to say, "One may fill one's stomach at lunch, like a cannon which has been loaded with gunpowder, but supper must be light." He told me at Shyampukur: "Read the Bhagavad Gita. There you will find instructions concerning moderate eating for a yogi." The yogis eat neither too much nor too little. They eat food which is simple, substantial, and easily digestible. The Master advised some devotees to eat rice with ghee and milk. He mentioned that it was the food of the ancient sages.

The History of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Once the Master said to me: "The Divine Mother has told me that you have to do a little work for her. You will have to teach the Bhagavata, the word of God, to humanity. God binds the Bhagavata pandit to the world with one tie; otherwise, who would remain to explain the sacred book? He keeps the pandit bound for the good of men. That is why the Divine Mother has kept you in the world."

To what extent can we foresee God's plan? The Master made me start keeping a diary in 1867 when I was a student of class eight at Hare School. Since then I

recorded in my journal my daily activities, the places I had visited, and so on. I met the Master in the later part of February 1882. That is when my habit of maintaining a diary really became fruitful. When we look back on our past we realize that God is making us do everything. God determines beforehand what he will do through a particular person and then gets it done through him. There were many people around the Master, but he made me write the chronicle. As a result, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* came into existence. I was an apprentice for fifteen years. The hard discipline greatly helped me. It sharpened my memory and increased my skill in writing. I could recall the sequence of all of the incidents that had occurred during the day after I returned home at night. I would try to remember the first lines of the songs I had heard. This is the way the Master worked through me.

I was involved in worldly activities, bound to my work, and could not visit the Master whenever I wished. Therefore I used to note down his words so that I could think over what he had said between my visits to him. In this way the impressions made on my mind might not be counteracted by the stress of worldly work and responsibilities. It was thus for my own benefit that I first took notes, so that I might realize his teachings more perfectly.

I used to memorize the Master's words, and then after returning home I would write brief notes in my diary. Sometimes I would spend the whole night in completing my record. Later I would fill in all the details from memory. Sometimes I would spend seven days completing the record of one day's happenings. Thus *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* appeared in book form from the notes of my diary. Sometimes I had to wait for a word of the Master's to come to my mind as a chataka bird waits for a drop of rainwater to fall. Sometimes I meditated on one scene over a thousand times. As a result I could vividly visualize the Master's divine play, though it had happened long before. By the grace of the Master I used to feel that his play had just happened. Therefore one can say that it was written in the Master's presence. At times I would not be satisfied with a particular description of an episode, so I would get absorbed in meditation on the Master. Then the correct picture would vividly appear in my mind. Therefore, from a human standpoint there was a great distance of time, but in my thought world I felt that it had happened just before I recorded it. My account is not culled from other sources. I recorded whatever I heard with my own ears from the Master's lips and whatever I saw of his life with my own eyes.

Swami Vivekananda wrote to me about the *Gospel:* "The move is quite original. Never was the life of a great teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are doing." *The Gospel of Sri*

Ramakrishna is the world's only firsthand record of the life and teachings of an avatar. One can collect materials about Sri Ramakrishna in three ways: First, direct observation recorded on the same day; second, direct observation but unrecorded during the lifetime of the Master; and third, hearsay, also unrecorded during the lifetime of the Master. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* belongs to the first category. I was present during each scene of the *Gospel.*

I have published my diary very carefully. If there is any mistake in it, then its value will diminish. People do not realize that at one time I had to study the rules of evidence. If a witness makes a single mistake, the entire case becomes nullified. Addressing the judge, the lawyer says, "My Lord, this witness is not reliable." I used to visit the court and observe all these details. The evidence of an eyewitness is very valuable. For that reason the judge asks, "Did you see this yourself?" If a person has seen and heard something himself, his words carry weight. I checked all the facts and details before I published the *Gospel.*

(When somebody asked M. to remove some of the repetitions from the Gospel, *he replied:)* I cannot do that. The Master told the same parable to different people. If I remove a particular section, the train of the conversation will be broken. Moreover, you won't be able to see the effect of the *Gospel* on a particular person's life. The Master gave the same teaching to five different people in five different places. What he said to Bartkim, he said to others also; and whatever conversation he had with Vivekananda, he had with others too.

You see, sometimes the brilliance of a diamond is enhanced by changing its setting. Putting it on the dusty ground produces one effect, and putting it on a green lawn produces another. But putting it in a casket lined with blue velvet produces the most brilliant effect of all. The same is true of the words in the *Gospel.* The rays of the sun look different when they fall on water, on the earth, and on glass, but the maximum brilliance is produced when the sun is reflected on glass. So I cannot avoid the repetitions in the *Gospel,* because removing them would disturb the Master's dialogue.

Once Hriday said to the Master: "Uncle, please reserve some of your best teachings. Otherwise, if you say everything all at once, and then repeat the same thing again and again, people will not come to you anymore." The Master replied: "You rascal! I shall repeat my words fifty times. What does it matter to you?"

The Master used to say, "The world is a burning fire." And I fully realized it. After the boys enter the world and are tormented by sorrows and sufferings, the Master's immortal words will save them, like a loving mother. If they remember at least one of the Master's teachings, that will be like a boat to ferry them across

the turbulent ocean of maya and it will bring peace to their lives.

[In spite of his illness, M. read the proofs of the last part of the Bengali Gospel *at one o'clock in the morning by the light of a kerosene lantern. Being lovingly chastised by his colleague, he said:]*

People are finding peace by reading this book, the Master's immortal message. It is inevitable that the body will meet its end, so it is better that it be used for spreading peace to others. We are in the world and have fully experienced how much pain there is in it, yet I have forgotten that pain through *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.* I am hurrying so that the book may come out soon.

"I Am an Avatar"

Standing in the pine grove of Dakshineswar, the Master said to me: "I am an avatar. I am God in human form." He also told me, "I will have to be born again." The Master proclaimed again and again, "The greatest duty of man is to realize God." And he himself fully demonstrated this ideal in his own life.

When an avatar descends, a current of bliss flows everywhere. So Christ said, "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" Christ was an avatar. One day the Master told me, "Christ, Gauranga, and I are one." A person experiences uninterrupted bliss while he lives with an avatar. But when the avatar departs, sorrow and gloominess come. I forgot the world for five years. When the Master was with us we floated in bliss. Now I experience happiness one day and misery another. What a wonderful time we had with the Master—festivals, feasts, singing, dancing! When the Master passed away I fasted for three days.

I am an insignificant person, but I live by the side of an ocean, and I keep with me a few pitchers of sea water. When a visitor comes, I entertain him with that. What else can I speak but the words of the Master?

If anybody asks me what the greatest event of my life was, I would say that I met Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa—my Master.

GIRISH CHANDRA GHOSH

[From: Vedanta and the West (Vedanta Press, Hollywood), March-April 1953]

Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912) was a well-known actor and playwright even before meeting Sri Ramakrishna. Though he wanted to renounce the world

after coming in contact with Sri Ramakrishna, at the Master's command he continued his writing career. He thus greatly inspired many people through his dramas as well as through his life.

When the responsibility of writing an article on Sri Ramakrishna fell on me, I thought it would be a very simple thing. But actually, I find the writing extremely difficult. I thought it would be easy, for I have enjoyed his unfathomable love. I have also heard from each disciple how Sri Ramakrishna showered his infinite love on him. Many a time with enraptured minds, we have discussed among ourselves that great love. Whenever a disciple would recount his personal experiences, immediately as a reaction, a hundred fountains would open up from within and a hundred streams would flow with a gushing torrent. Not so much from the actual words of the disciple, but from the manner of his expression a sympathetic chord in my heart would be touched, and his experience would become vivid and living before my mind's eye.

A single word of the disciple, a single incident described, would make me feel that I too had heard such words of affection—I too had seen many such acts of compassion. With a single word the disciple would relive the experience and the listener would feel himself to be a participant. But I wonder if my readers will be able to share with equal vividness my own experiences. Shall I be able to convey them in words? Let me ask a question: Can you describe the warmth of affection which you have received from your own mother? For myself, I could not. I could only exclaim," Ah, mother's love, mother's love." In every act of my mother, in her every glance and movement, what I have felt is beyond my words to describe. Besides, could anyone really understand a mother's love without becoming a mother? Even were such understanding possible, an understanding of Sri Ramakrishna's love lies far beyond it.

Our relationships in the world are conditioned by maya. Father's love or mother's love can also be said to fall within maya. Usually love prompted by maya, desires only the worldly happiness of the son. It seeks only his worldly prosperity and nothing more. Very often it is seen that if the son, for the sake of spiritual enlightenment, pays no attention to worldly duties, he becomes a source of annoyance to his parents. In spite of his possessing good qualities, if the son prefers monastic life to marriage, he becomes an object of displeasure to his parents. They advise him that there is time for everything, and that he should attend to spiritual life after finishing his life in the world and discharging his duties to the world in a proper manner. If the boy does not listen to their advice, they may not say in so many words that their son has gone astray, but will not

refrain from saying to friends and relations with a sigh of regret that he is useless and lacking in purpose. There is selfishness in the love of parents. It is seen that the father is partial to an accomplished son. As long as the son is a mere boy and helpless, the parents are unselfish. But most parents expect that in their old age they will be looked after and provided for by their sons. Greater is the love of the mother for the son who has no talents. Father's love or mother's love is very high indeed. But it cannot be said that it is absolutely free from selfishness.

If I stretch my imagination I can have a glimpse of my parents' love. But the love of Sri Ramakrishna—that immaculately pure and absolutely unselfish love—how can I comprehend it? How shall I portray it in words? Without attaining the state of consciousness that is free from the touch of selfishness, free from the delusion of maya, how shall I understand the actions of a person who has broken the bonds of maya and is without faults? If I had attained that condition in which Sri Ramakrishna lived, the condition of being totally free from maya, and if I had had a disciple, I could then have gained the power of understanding Sri Ramakrishna's love in a small measure. But I don't know whether I would have been able to express it. I have grasped to some extent the love of Sri Ramakrishna by listening to the stories which other disciples have narrated to me and by comparing notes which I myself have gathered, but it is not possible to describe the story of the pilgrimage of the soul which a fellow traveller has made and paint a picture of the longings and aspirations of his heart. I may or may not know the story of my own life, but the story of another man's life is a completely sealed book to me. Therefore in this article I shall tell only my own tale, what I felt about the love of Sri Ramakrishna in relation to me. Beyond that I am helpless. I must speak about myself. My listeners, out of compassion for my pitiable condition, must kindly forgive me.

Another thing, those who went to Sri Ramakrishna were all gentle, good-natured, and virtuous. Boys like Narendra and others, who are considered as his own, visited the Master at an early age, when they were very young. Being drawn by his love, they left their hearth and home and later embraced the monastic life in order to carry out his mission. To describe his love for them will hardly give a correct picture of his love. His affection for these boys, who were pure and spotless and who had taken shelter in him after renouncing everything for his sake, was quite natural. But I too was the recipient of his love. This seems to me something extraordinary. Sri Ramakrishna loved me unstintedly. This was proof of the fact that he was an ocean of unconditional mercy and boundless compassion.

Sri Ramakrishna gave me refuge at a time when I was torn by conflicts and brutal agony of the heart. My early training, lack of a guardian from childhood, wayward youthful tendencies—all these conspired to lead me away from the path. Atheism was the fashion of the day. Belief in the existence of God was considered foolish and a sign of weakness. In my circle of friends if one could prove the nonexistence of God, one received the most extravagant praise and honour. I used to make fun of those who believed in God. After reading a few pages about science I jumped to the conclusion that religion was pure imagination and myth. Priests had concocted it to frighten people into morality and abstention from evil-doing. Wisdom lay in accomplishing one's ends by any means, fair or foul. An unworthy act became ignoble when it was discovered and not before that. It was daylight that made sin. To fulfill one's purpose secretly was a proof of talent. To satisfy one's desire through cleverness was a mark of intelligence. But in a world ruled by providence such intelligence does not last. Evil days are bound to come. When they come they teach hard truths. I learned from them one big lesson, that there is no way to hide a wicked deed. There is a saying, "Murder will out." Too true, as I learned. But the deeds had already begun to bear fruit. A terrible future was painted in vivid colours on the canvas of my mind. It was not the end but only the beginning of the episode that darkened my destiny. Punishment had begun, but the way to its escape had not yet been found. Friendless, and surrounded on all sides by enemies who took advantage of my misdeeds to ruin me, I felt that I was adrift on a sea of despair.

At such a crisis I thought: "Does God exist? Does he listen to the prayers of man? Does he show him the way from darkness to light?" My mind said, "Yes." Immediately I closed my eyes and prayed: "Oh God, if thou art, carry me across. Give me refuge. I have none." I remembered the words of the Gita: "Those who call on me only in the days of affliction, to them too I bring succour and refuge." These words sank deep in my consciousness and gave me solace in sorrow. I found the words of the Gita to be true. As the sun removes the darkness of the night, so the sun of hope arose and dispelled the gloom that had gathered thick in my mind. In the sea of trouble I found the harbour of repose. But I had nurtured doubt all these years. I had argued long, saying, "There is no God." Where would the impressions of these thoughts go? I began to reason in terms of cause and effect and argued that such and such a cause had produced such and such an effect, which was instrumental in bringing release from this danger. It is said that doubt dies hard. Again I fell victim to doubt. But I had not the courage to say boldly, "God does not exist."

Desire for inquiry came. Looking into the current of events, sometimes faith, sometimes doubt, emerged. Everybody with whom I discussed my problems said unanimously that without instruction from a guru doubt would not go and nothing could be achieved in spiritual life. But my intellect refused to accept a human being as a guru, for one has to salute the guru with the words, “Guru is Brahma, Guru is Vishnu, Guru is the Lord Maheshwara, the god of gods, etc.” How could I say this to a man like me? This was hypocrisy. But the tyranny of doubt was intolerable. Terrible conflicts pierced my heart through and through. That condition can better be imagined than described. Suppose a man, all of a sudden, is forcibly dragged to a dark, solitary room with his eyes covered and kept confined there with no food and drink. What will be the state of his mind? If you can picture his mental condition, you will be able to understand something of my own. There were moments when I was breathless with emotion. Thoughts of despair bit through me like a saw. At other times the memory of the past was revived and the darkness of rny heart knew no bounds. Just at this time I saw Sri Ramakrishna passing by our lane to the house of Balaram, the great devotee, and for the first time I felt irresistibly drawn to him.

Some time previously I had read in the *Indian Mirror* that there was a Paramahansa who was living in Dakshineswar. Keshab Chandra Sen was visiting him frequently, accompanied by his disciples. With my little understanding I thought that the Brahmos, who had many strange ideas, had created a fake Paramahansa. He could not be the real thing.

A few years later Sri Ramakrishna was to come to the residence of Balaram Basu at Ramkanta Bose’s Street. High-souled Balaram had invited many in our neighbourhood to come and visit the Master. I too had an invitation, so I went. After arriving there I found Sri Ramakrishna had already come and Bidhu, a dancing girl, was seated by his side in order to sing a few devotional songs for him. Quite a large gathering had assembled in Balaram’s drawing room. Suddenly my eyes were opened to a new vision by Sri Ramakrishna’s conduct. I used to think that those who consider themselves Paramahansas or yogis do not speak with anybody. They do not salute anybody. If strongly urged, they allow others to serve them. But the behaviour of this Paramahansa was quite different. With the utmost humility he was showing respect to everybody by bowing his head on the ground. An old friend of mine, pointing at him, said sarcastically: “Bidhu has had a previous intimacy with him. That’s why he is laughing and joking with her.” But I did not like his insinuations. Just at this time Sishir Kumar Ghosh, the well-known editor of *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, arrived. He

seemed to have very little respect for Sri Ramakrishna. He said, “Let us go. Enough of him!” I wanted to stay and see a little more, but he insisted and made me come with him. This was my second meeting.

Again some days went by. My play, *The Life of Chaitanya*, was being enacted in the Star Theatre. I was strolling in the outer compound of the theatre one day when Mahendra Nath Mukhopadhyay, one of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, came and said to me: “Paramahansadeva has come to see the play. If you allow him a free pass, well and good. Otherwise we will buy a ticket for him.”

I replied: “He will not have to purchase his ticket. But the others will have to.” Saying this, I proceeded to greet him. I found him alighting from the carriage and entering the compound of the theatre. I wanted to salute him, but before I could do so he saluted me. I returned his salute. He saluted me again. I bowed my head and he did the same to me. I thought this might continue forever, so I greeted him mentally and led him upstairs and offered him a seat in the box. After arranging with an attendant to fan him, I returned home, feeling indisposed. This was my third meeting.

Before I narrate my fourth meeting I must tell you the condition of religion that prevailed in the country at that time. During my school days those who were called “Young Bengal” were the people who were recognized in society as respectable and learned. They were the first products of Western education in Bengal. The majority of them were materialists. A small minority had been converted to Christianity. Some of them accepted the creed of the Brahmo Samaj, but few of them had any respect for Hinduism. Orthodox Hindus were bitterly torn by sectarianism. Conflict between Shaktas and Vaishnavas was very strong. And Vaishnavism too was divided into many sects, each contending for supremacy over the other. Rivalry was growing fast between one sect and another. Moreover there were other faiths prevalent at the time. Each faith condemned the followers of the other faiths to the darkness of hell. Added to this, many brahmin priests were degenerate. They were completely ignorant of their own scriptures and were not even familiar with the formalities of religion, and yet they acted as priests and preachers. In a word, they lived a most hypocritical life.

On the other hand, the youths of the day, having studied a few pages of English, became iconoclasts at heart. The materialists were considered the most enlightened people on earth because of their erudition and scholarship, and so their words were accepted as the supreme authority. The sign of scholarship was not to believe in God. Under such circumstances, the young educated people lost all faith in their own religion. But there would be discussion now and then

among ourselves about the existence of God. Occasionally I would attend the services of the Brahmo Samaj, and would sometimes visit the one in our neighbourhood, but I arrived at no conclusion. Whether God existed or not I was doubtful. If he existed, which religion should I follow? I argued much, deliberated much, but could not find any solution.

This made me uneasy. Then one day I prayed, “Oh Lord, if thou art, show me the way.” But there was egotism in my heart, and I thought: “All the necessities of material life, such as air, water, and light, are abundantly supplied by nature and available for man to enjoy. Why should not religion, so essential for eternal life, be equally available. To me, it seems neither natural nor within my reach, and therefore it must be false. Materialism must be true.” Thus I passed fourteen long years in a fog of gloom.

Then came evil days which allowed me no rest. There was darkness within, there was darkness without—darkness everywhere. I thought: “Is there any escape? I have seen people taking refuge in Taraknath Shiva when they suffer from some incurable disease. My condition too was very serious. To get release from my trouble was almost impossible. At this juncture, would it do me good if I prayed to Taraknath Shiva, the protector of his devotees? Let me test it! I made an honest attempt to resign myself to the will of the Lord, and my attempt was successful. A network of danger was pierced through in no time. A firm conviction arose that God was not unreal.

I was saved from the present danger, but was this the way to ultimate salvation? Terrible conflict was raging in my mind, and I was uncertain which way to take. I had seen the glory of Taraknath. Why not call on him again? Gradually faith in God began to grow in me. But they said that no liberation is possible without a guru. Furthermore, I was told that one must look upon the guru as God. My reason found this hard to accept. The very idea was revolting to me, for nothing seemed more blasphemous than to think of man as God. I must trudge on alone without a human guru. I would pray to Taraknath. Let him be my guru. I had heard of some people to whom the Lord had appeared as guru in a vision and who thus received their spiritual instruction without a human intermediary. If he would shower such grace on me, I would be saved. Otherwise I was helpless. But I had not seen Taraknath. What should I do then? Let me chant his name in the morning and then see what happens.

At this time I became acquainted with a painter who was a Vaishnava. I don’t know if it was true or not, but he said to me one day: “I offer food to the Deity every day, and I am convinced by certain signs that he accepts it. Until one is initiated by a guru such a rare privilege will not happen in one’s life.” My mind became restless. I took leave of him, went to my room, closed all the doors, and

began to weep.

Three days later I was sitting on the porch of a friend's house, which was at an intersection, and I saw Sri Ramakrishna slowly approaching, accompanied by Narayan and a couple of other devotees.

No sooner had I turned my eyes towards him than he saluted me. I returned his salute. Then he went on. For no accountable reason my heart felt drawn towards him by an invisible string. As soon as he had gone a short distance, I felt an urge to follow him. I could not keep calm, for the attraction I felt was not of this earth. It was something for which no former experience had ever prepared me. It was something unique, which no words could describe. Just at that moment a person, whose name I do not recall, brought me a message from him and said, "Sri Ramakrishna is calling you." I went.

Sri Ramakrishna went on to Balaram's, and there I followed him. Balaram was lying on a couch, seemingly ill. The moment he saw Sri Ramakrishna he got up quickly and with great reverence prostrated himself before him. After an exchange of a few words with Balaram, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly exclaimed, "I am all right, I am all right." So saying, he went into a state of consciousness which seemed very strange to me. Then he remarked, "No, no, this is not pretense, this is not pretense." He remained in this state for a while and then resumed his normal state. I asked him, "What is a guru?" He answered: "Do you know what the guru is? He is like a matchmaker. A matchmaker arranges for the union of the bride with the bridegroom. Likewise a guru prepares for the meeting of the individual soul with his Beloved, the Divine Spirit." Actually, he did not use the word matchmaker, but a slang expression, more forceful. Then he said: "You need not worry. Your guru has already been chosen." I asked, "What is the mantram?" He replied, "The name of God." And as an example he told the following story:

"Ramananda used to bathe in the Ganga early every morning. On one of the steps of the ghat a weaver by the name of Kavir was lying, and as Ramananda came down the steps his feet accidentally touched the body of Kavir. Being conscious of the divine presence in all, he uttered the word 'Rama.' Kavir, on hearing this name from the lips of a holy man, took it to be his mantram, and by chanting it he eventually realized God."

Then the talk drifted to the theatre, and he said: "I liked your play very much. The sun of knowledge has begun to shine upon you. All the blemishes of your heart will be washed away. Very soon devotion will arise to sweeten your life with profuse joy and peace." I told him that I had none of those qualities and that I had written the play only with the idea of making some money. He kept quiet. Then he said, "Could you take me to your theatre and show me another play of

yours?" I replied, "Very well, any day you like." He said, "You must charge me something." I said "All right, you may pay eight annas." Sri Ramakrishna said, "That will allow me a seat in the balcony, which is a very noisy place." I answered: "Oh no, you will not go there. You will sit in the same place that you sat last time." He said, "Then you must take one rupee." I said, "All right, as you please." Our talk ended.

Soon after this, Haripada and I saluted Sri Ramakrishna and came out of Balaram's house. On the way Haripada asked me, "What do you think of him?" I replied, "A great devotee." My heart was filled with unspeakable joy, for it seemed as though my search for a guru had ended. For did not Sri Ramakrishna say that my guru had already been chosen?

Looking back at my former objections to a guru, I understood the pride and vanity which had lain behind my rationalizations. I had thought: "After all, the guru is a man. The disciple is also a man. Why should one man stand before another with folded palms and follow him like a slave?" But time after time in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna my pride crumbled into dust. Meeting me at the theatre, he had first saluted me. How could my pride remain in the presence of such a humble man? The memory of his humility created an indelible impression on my mind.

There was a special room on the second floor of the Star Theatre, which was intended for the visitors of the dress circle to sit in during the concert. Sri Ramakrishna came there, and a good number of devotees joined him. He started conversing with me. He spoke of several things while I listened longingly. I felt a spiritual current passing, as it were, through my body from foot to head and head to foot. All of a sudden Sri Ramakrishna lost outer consciousness and went into ecstasy, and in that mood he started talking with a young devotee. Many years earlier I had heard some slandering remarks against him, made by a very wicked man. Suddenly I remembered those words, and at that moment Sri Ramakrishna's ecstasy broke and his mood changed. Pointing towards me, he said, "There is some crookedness in your heart." I thought: "Yes, indeed. Plenty of it—of various kinds." But I was at a loss to understand which kind he was particularly referring to. I asked, "How shall I get rid of it?" Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Have faith!"

Time rolled on. One afternoon I went to the theatre and saw on my desk a slip of paper with a note that Sri Ramakrishna would be going to Ram Chandra Datta's house at Madhu Roy's Lane, Calcutta. After reading that note I felt in my heart the same kind of strong urge to go to meet him as I had felt on that day when I saw the Master coming while I was sitting on the porch of a friend's house in our neighbourhood. I was very eager to go. But again I considered,

“Should I go to a stranger’s house without an invitation?” But the pull of the invisible string was strong. I had to go. I went as far as Anath Babu’s market and stopped. Then I thought again, “No, I must not go.” But I was helplessly drawn. I would go a few steps and then stop. I hesitated even after coming very near to the house of Rani Chandra.

At last I reached the gate. Ram Chandra was sitting there and ushered me in. It was evening. Sri Ramakrishna was dancing in ecstasy in the courtyard. There was singing accompanied by a drum, and the devotees were dancing in a circle around Sri Ramakrishna. The words of the song were: “Nadia is shaken by the surging waves of divine love emanating from the heart of Gauranga.” The courtyard seemed a sea of bliss. Tears filled my eyes. Sri Ramakrishna suddenly became still, absorbed in samadhi. The devotees began to take the dust of his feet. I wanted to do the same, but I could not, as I was shy. I was thinking of what others might say if I went to Sri Ramakrishna and took the dust of his feet. No sooner had this thought crossed my mind than Sri Ramakrishna, coming down from samadhi, began dancing again. While dancing he came before me and stood still, once more absorbed in samadhi. Now there was no longer any hesitation on my part to touch his feet. I took the dust of his feet.

After the music Sri Ramakrishna came and sat in the drawing room and I followed him. Then he began to talk to me. I asked him, “Will the crookedness go out of my heart?” He said, “Yes, it will go.” Again I asked him the same question, and he gave the same reply. I repeated it once more, and he said the same thing. But Manomohan Mittra, an ardent devotee of his, said to me rudely: “Enough. He has already answered you. Why do you bother him again?” I turned towards him to answer sharply, for no one who criticized me ever escaped the lash of my tongue. But I controlled myself, thinking: “Manomohan must be right. He who does not believe when told once will not believe even if he is told a hundred times.” I bowed down before Sri Ramakrishna and returned to my theatre.

One night, in a happy and drunken mood, I was visiting a house of prostitution with two of my friends. But suddenly I felt an urge to visit Sri Ramakrishna. My friends and I hired a carriage and drove out to Dakshineswar. It was late at night, and everyone was asleep. The three of us entered Sri Ramakrishna’s room, tipsy and reeling. Sri Ramakrishna grasped both my hands and began to sing and dance in ecstasy. The thought flashed through my mind: “Here is a man whose love embraces all—even a wicked man like me, whose own family would condemn me in this state. Surely this holy man, respected by the righteous, is also the saviour of the fallen.”

After these meetings with Sri Ramakrishna I began to wonder: “Who is this

man who speaks to me with such intimacy and makes me feel that he is my very own? No longer do I fear my own sins, for I feel sure he would not condemn me. Though he seems to know me through and through, a confession might do me great good. I must take shelter at his feet, for he alone can bring me peace."

I felt as if I were born anew. I was a totally changed man. There was no more doubt or conflict in my mind. "God is real. God is my sanctuary. I have found my refuge in this God-man. Now I can easily realize God." Thoughts like these cast their spell on me night and day. While awake or while dreaming, the same mood persisted: "Fearless am I! I have found my very own. The world can no longer bind me, for even the greatest fear, the fear of death, is gone."

Meanwhile, I would hear from various devotees that the Master had spoken affectionately of me. If anybody would criticize me, Sri Ramakrishna would say: "It is not true. You do not know. He has tremendous faith."

Sri Ramakrishna would come to the theatre now and then to visit me, bringing some sweets for me from Dakshineswar. He would first taste them and then give them to me. Immediately my mood would change, and I would feel like a little child, fed by a loving parent.

Although I had come to regard Sri Ramakrishna as my very own, the scars of past impressions were not so easily healed. One day, under the influence of liquor, I began to abuse him in most unutterable language. The devotees of the Master grew furious and they were about to punish me, but he restrained them. Abuse continued to flow from my lips in a torrent. Sri Ramakrishna kept quiet and then silently returned to Dakshineswar. There was no remorse in my heart. As a spoiled child might carelessly berate his father, so did I abuse Sri Ramakrishna without any fear of punishment. Soon my behaviour became common gossip, and I began to realize my mistake. But at the same time I had so much faith in his love, and felt his love was so infinite, that I did not fear for a moment that Sri Ramakrishna could ever desert me.

As the days passed on I began to feel more and more remorse for my conduct towards this gentle holy man, who was the very soul of love. Thinking of the other devotees who worshipped him with adoration, I was full of self-reproach. It was in this state of depression that Sri Ramakrishna found me a few days later, and in an ecstatic mood he said: "Girish Ghosh, don't worry. People will be amazed at your transformation."

Sri Ramakrishna has taken full possession of my heart and bound it with his love. But such a love cannot be measured by any earthly standard. If I have acquired any virtues, it is not through my own efforts, but solely due to his grace. He literally accepted my sins and left my soul free. If any of his devotees would speak of sin and sinfulness, he would rebuke him saying: "Stop that! Why

talk of sin? He who repeatedly says, ‘I am a worm, I am a worm, becomes a worm. He who thinks, I am free, I am free,’ becomes free. Always have that positive attitude that you are free, and no sin will cling to you.”

The significance of the word *guru* has dawned on me gradually. It was a slow process, but its effect was deeply penetrating. Now I have realized that the guru is everything. He is my all in all. Through him my life has been blessed. To this redeemer of my soul I have paid little homage. In a drunken state I have abused him. When given the opportunity to serve him, I have ignored it. But I have no regrets. In my attempts to escape all discipline I found myself disciplined without knowing it. Such is my guru’s grace—an infinite ocean of mercy, not conferred because of merit, nor withheld because of sin, but lavished on saint and sinner alike. With a love transcending reason, he has given me sanctuary, and I have no fear. Hail Sri Ramakrishna!

YOGIN-MA (YOGINDRA MOHINI BISWAS)

(From: Ramakrishna-Saradamrita, by Swami Nirlepananda (KarunaPrakashani, Calcutta), 1968; Sn SriMayer Katha (Udbodhan Office, Calcutta), vol. 1,1969)

Yogin-ma (1851-1924) met Sri Ramakrishna in 1882 at Balaram Basu’s house and often stayed at Dakshineswar with Holy Mother in order to serve her and the Master. After the Master’s passing away Yogin-ma became one of Holy Mother’s main attendants.

Balaram Babu was related to me, being my husband’s maternal uncle. He had many excellent qualities. For example, whenever he decided to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, he would hire a boat, and early in the morning he would go from door to door inviting the Master’s devotees to accompany him. Such humility! It was his wish that they share with him the bliss that he enjoyed in the Master’s presence.

One day Sri Ramakrishna came to Balaram Babu’s house and we went to see him. It was the first time I saw him. The Master was standing at one side of the hall in deep samadhi. He had no outer consciousness. Since no one dared touch him, people bowed down to him from a distance. We also did the same. At that time I had no idea what samadhi was. I at first thought that he was a drunken devotee of Kali. I could not understand the Master at my first meeting. Moreover, it immediately came to my mind that my married life had been ruined by a drunken husband, and again should I undo my spiritual life through the influence of this seemingly drunken person? But gradually I became acquainted

with the Master.

At first we went to Dakshineswar with Balaram Babu, but later, my mother and I, together with Balaram Babu's wife and other women devotees, would go by ourselves. Gradually I began to feel an attraction for the Master. Just the thought of visiting him would make my mind dance with joy. On the day that I planned to go there I would get up early and finish my household duties as quickly as possible. My longing to see him knew no bounds. After arriving at his room I would forget everything, sitting in his presence. The Master used to experience samadhi off and on, and at that time we would look at his face with wonder. He was so compassionate! Whenever I brought him some ordinary preparations he would relish them like a young boy, saying joyfully, "Very tasty! Delicious!" And always at the time of our departure he would say, "Come back again."

Some time after my first visit, Holy Mother left for her country home. I stood on the bank of the Ganga and watched her departure, waiting until the boat was no longer visible. After that I returned to the nahabat and wept bitterly. The Master, on his way back from the Panchavati, noticed me crying, and after returning to his room he sent for me. "Her leaving caused a great deal of pain for you," he said tenderly. He then began to console me by recounting the marvellous spiritual experiences he had had during his days of tantric sadhana. When Holy Mother returned after about a year and a half, he told her: "That girl with nice large eyes, who comes here frequently, loves you very much. She wept profusely at the nahabat when you left for home." Mother replied: "Yes, I know her very well. Her name is Yogin."

"What do I know about him? Some people call him 'Paramahansa,' some call him 'Young Priest,' and others call him 'Gadadhar Chatterjee.' Please ask someone else to help you find him." Unfortunately my grandmother did not press the matter further and returned home.

Holy Mother used to live in the nahabat like a shy bride. She wore a cloth with a broad red border and vermilion on her forehead, and her hair was black, thick, and long. She also wore a necklace, a nose ring, earrings, and bracelets*(These bracelets were given by Mathur Babu to the Master while he was practising the spiritual discipline of madhura bhava.)* Her company gave me immense joy. She liked very much the way I braided her hair, and I was delighted to do it for her.

One day she said to me: "Yogin, the Master awakens God-consciousness in so many people, but you know I have not gotten anything. Would you please tell him about this?" I was so simple-minded that I did not understand her. I went straight to the Master and reported to him what she had said, but he did not reply.

When I went back to the nahabat, I saw that the Mother was performing worship and was in an ecstatic mood. One moment she was laughing, another moment she was crying, and again another moment she was sitting motionless. I was amazed to witness this divine play. When Holy Mother came down to the normal plane of consciousness, I asked her, "You complained that you do not experience samadhi, but what is all this?" She smiled.

Whatever I learned was through the Master's grace. He asked me to read devotional scriptures, although normally he did not approve of much reading unless it was accompanied by the practise of spiritual disciplines. "What will you gain," he would say, "by reading a lot of books?"

One day I asked him, "What will happen to us?"

"What more do you want?" he replied. "You have seen me, fed me, and served me. What else do you need? Don't worry. The thousand-petalled lotus of your seventh plane [i.e., the sahasrara] will bloom at the time of your death." He further said: "At the last moment of the devotees, I shall have to appear before them. Otherwise, how will they get liberation?"

Once the Master said about the Mother: "Do you think she is an ordinary woman? She is a part of Saraswati—the goddess of learning and very intelligent. So she loves to dress herself nicely, since Saraswati is the embodiment of beauty. She is not a common woman—she is my Power."

SHIVANATH SHASTRI

[From: *The Modern Review,* November 1910]

Shivanath Shastri (1847-1919) was a preacher in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. When he first met Sri Ramakrishna, Shivanath was very fond of the Master. But later he stopped seeing Sri Ramakrishna because the latter helped some drunkards and actors and actresses. Moreover, some of the Master's disciples began to proclaim that Sri Ramakrishna was an Incarnation of God. Shivanath even considered Sri Ramakrishna's samadhi to be a derangement of the brain. When the Master heard this he told Shivananth, "How can one become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness?"

Shivanath wrote several books, including History of the Brahmo Samaj *and* Men I Have Seen. *For readability, this article has been thoroughly edited. Although some parts of it are controversial, it has some historical value. The article shows how some of the Brahmos regarded Sri Ramakrishna.*

My personal acquaintance with Ramakrishna Paramahansa began in 1875.I was then employed as Headmaster in the South Suburban School of Bhowanipore, Calcutta. While working there I became friends with a teacher from the London Missionary Society's Institution. He had been married at Dakshineswar, a village in the northern suburbs, where Ramakrishna Paramahansa lived. After his visits to Dakshineswar, my friend would come and relate the sayings and doings of a Hindu mendicant who lived at the Kali temple there. Some of these sayings seemed so remarkable to me that one day I accompanied my friend to see him. Ramakrishna Paramahansa was not well known then. Later, his fame spread when Keshab Chandra Sen began to publish accounts of his visits with him in his paper.

I have not kept any notes of our meetings. Consequently I am not able to record things in chronological order. But I shall narrate certain events as they linger in my memory without any special reference to time.

I do not remember what he said during our first interview, but I vividly recall that he received me very warmly, perhaps because my friend had previously mentioned my name to him. Addressing me again and again in his open-hearted, simple, and childlike manner, he said: "I am so delighted to see you. Will you come here now and then?" From the little of his personal history that I could gather from persons living there, I learned that he was an unlettered, poor brahmin who was formerly employed as a priest in the Kali temple. As a result of his extraordinary penances and austerities he had attained a state of perfection seldom seen.

Our friendship became closer after repeated visits, and he began to reveal his experiences to me. When acting as a priest in the temple he came in contact with many Hindu monks, saints, sages, and mendicants who, on their way to and from Puri, or Jagannath, would visit the Kali temple and often stay there for a while. Personal contact with these men brought about a revolution in the life of Ramakrishna. His hunger and thirst for spiritual truth, which was naturally great, was further strengthened. As a result, he devoted himself to the religious exercises many of them taught, and he practised austerities that were very severe.

I recollect some of them as related by the saint. What struck him most, and had an abiding influence on his mind, was the devastating effect of kamini kanchan, or "lust and greed." He emphasized that the most effective way to ensure spiritual detachment was to avoid "lust and greed" like poison. The means that he adopted for this purpose were unique. For instance, with a quantity of dust in one hand and some coins in the other, he would sit by the side of the river and compose himself into a state of meditation, trying to *realize* the

equal worthlessness of both dust and coins. He would repeat, “Dust is money; money is dust. Dust is money; money is dust,” and so on until the realization of that truth was complete. Then he would throw them both into the river.... I was personally present on an occasion when a few coins were placed in his hand by an inquiring visitor as an experiment. The saint fell into his usual ecstatic state and did not come back to consciousness until the coins were removed from his hand.

... Ramakrishna had earnestly resolved to practise what the visiting mendicants had taught him. For instance, one sage told him that the best way to acquire perfect obedience to the divine will was to cultivate the spirit of Hanuman, the famous monkey-servant of Rama, as delineated in the Ramayana. In order to cultivate that spirit, Ramakrishna shut himself in a room for a number of days and meditated on the virtues of Hanuman. He jumped about in the room saying, “Lord, Lord, I am thy devoted servant.”

... Added to all these [spiritual exercises] were strict regulations on diet and sleep. He fasted for days and denied himself rest during the nights. One can easily imagine that these severe austerities told upon his constitution, which seems to have been naturally frail. The first result was that his health completely broke down and he got throat cancer, which eventually caused his death. The other result was ... whenever there was any strong emotion or excitement, he would lose consciousness for the time being and his whole countenance would assume a radiant glow.

This seems to be unique to religious persons. It is said of Chaitanya, the famous prophet of Bengal, that under strong emotion his figure would assume such an ethereal glow that men would be struck with wonder and many would kiss his whole frame. It is also said of Muhammad that under deep religious emotion he would fall into an ecstatic state, and that many of his utterances given soon after such a state have been recorded in the Koran. Cases have also been known of Christian saints, both men and women, who went into ecstasy under strong religious emotion. To us Hindus of Bengal, both in the Brahmo Samaj and in the Vaishnava community, it is a fact of repeated experience that men and women become ecstatic during rapturous singing of sankirtan.What the latter achieved occasionally, men like Ramakrishna, Chaitanya, and Muhammad experienced habitually. Ramakrishna personally told me that he had such ecstasy as a result of the austerities mentioned above. Upon my expressing regret for their weakening his health, he said: “Yes, my friend, that will kill me. I have these ecstasies as a result of literally carrying out the injunctions of the monks who visited this temple.”

... The impression left in my mind from my association with him was that I

had seldom come across any other man in whom the hunger and thirst for spiritual life was,so great and who had undergone so many privations and sufferings for the practice of religion. Secondly, I was convinced that he was no longer a sadhak,but was a *siddha-purusha,*or one who had attained the direct vision of spiritual truth. He had direct spiritual visions of the Divine Mother, and from her flowed a fountain of noble impulses in his soul. He loved to speak of God as his Mother. The thought of the Divine Mother would rouse all his emotions, and he would go into ecstasy when singing of the Mother's love. Yet his concept of motherhood stretched far beyond any idol or image to a sense of the Infinite. When he spoke or sang about the Mother, his thoughts far surpassed the limits of the four-handed goddess Kali. One of his favourite songs was, "Oh Mother, dance, once commingling thy smiles and thy flute" — i.e., commingling ali and Krishna. He would often say that only fools make the distinction between Kali and Krishna. They are the manifestations of the same Power.

Speaking of Ramakrishna's spirituality and catholicity, one incident comes to my mind. A Christian preacher of Bhowanipore, who was my personal friend, once accompanied me on a visit to Ramakrishna. When I introduced him to Ramakrishna, I said, "Today I bring a Christian preacher, who, having heard of you from me, was very eager to see you." The saint bowed his head to the ground and said, "I bow again and again at the feet of Jesus." Then the following conversation took place:

My Christian friend: "How is it, sir, that you bow at the feet of Christ? What do you think of him?"

Ramakrishna: "Why, I look upon him as an Incarnation of God."

My friend: "Incarnation of God! Kindly explain what you mean by that."

Ramakrishna: "An Incarnation like our Rama or Krishna. Don't you know there is a passage in the Bhagavat that says the Incarnations of Vishnu, or the Supreme Being, are innumerable?"

My friend: "Please explain further. I do not quite understand."

Ramakrishna: "Just take the case of the ocean. It is a wide and almost infinite expanse of water, but owing to certain circumstances some parts of this wide sea become solidified into ice. When transformed into ice it can be easily manipulated and applied to special use. An Incarnation is something like that. Like that infinite expanse of water, there is the Infinite Power immanent in matter and mind. But for some special purposes, in special regions, a portion of that Infinite Power assumes, as it were, a tangible shape in history. That is what you call a great man, but actually he is a local manifestation of the all-pervading Divine Power—in other words, an Incarnation of God. The greatness of great men is essentially the manifestation of Divine Energy."

My friend: “I understand your position, though we do not quite agree with it. I would like to know what my Brahmo friends say to this.”

Ramakrishna: “Don’t talk to those fools *(meaning, members of the Brahmo Samaj)*. They have no eyes to see such things.”

Myself*:* “Sir, who told you we don’t believe that the greatness of the great teachers of humanity was divinely communicated and in that sense they were Incarnations of a Divine Idea?”

Ramakrishna: “Is that what you really believe? I did not know that.” Afterwards there was a conversation during which the saint illustrated, in his well-known, homey way, many spiritual truths which struck my Christian friend as being very noteworthy.

After this I visited the saint whenever I had the leisure. Many were the meetings and many were the utterances. I do not remember all of them, but the following incident still lingers in my mind.

On one occasion I was in his room along with a few others who, during the saint’s temporary absence, began to discuss the feasibility of certain divine attributes. I was getting tired of the discussion when the saint returned. While entering the room, he caught some words of the discussion and also observed the heated nature of it. At once he put a stop to the discussion by saying: “Stop, stop! What is the good of discussing the feasibility of divine attributes? These attributes are acquired by prayerfully waiting and thinking. For instance, you say God is good. Can you convince me of his goodness by reasoning? Take that terrible flood that recently occurred at Dakhin Sabazpore as a result of a storm at sea. We hear thousands of men, women, and children were carried away and drowned. How can you prove to me that a good God, a beneficent Deity, ordered all that? Perhaps you will answer by pointing out the good that resulted from the flood — how it carried away the filth, how it fertilized the soil, and so on. But my question is this: Could not a good God do all that without carrying off hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children?” At this point one in the audience interrupted Ramakrishna by saying, “Are we then to believe that God was cruel?” Ramakrishna responded: “You fool! Who tells you to believe that? Join your hands in reverential humility and say: ‘Oh God, we are too weak and too incompetent to know thy nature and thy doings. Do thou enlighten our understanding.’”

Then he illustrated this truth with the following parable: “Take the case of two men who, while travelling on a certain road, take shelter in a mango grove. It is the season for mangoes. One of them sits with pencil and paper in hand and

begins to calculate. He counts the number of mango trees in the garden, the nymber of branches on each tree, and the average number of mangoes oh each branch. Then he tries to imagine how many cartloads of mangoes the garden will supply and then again, taking each cartload to be worth so many rupees, how much money the garden will fetch in the market.

"While this man is counting up the probable income from the garden, the other is engaged in plucking ripe mangoes and eating them. Which one do you consider wiser?" "The second one was wiser," said a visitor, "for it is certainly wiser to eat the fruits than to count up the probable income from the garden." Then the saint smiled and remarked: "Likewise, it is wiser to pray to God and cultivate communion with him rather than to argue about the reasonableness of his attributes. Pray and open your hearts to him and the light will come to you."

Another incident occurred as I was approaching the temple of Dakshineswar after a long absence. I found the saint, in his simple and childlike fashion, trying to drive crows away from the trees with a bow and arrow. This sight surprised me. "What is this? Have you turned into an archer?" I exclaimed. He seemed to be equally surprised to see me after so long and, throwing down the bow and arrow, he ran to embrace me. So great was his delight that he fell into ecstasy. Slowly I took him to his room, laid him on his bed, and waited for him to regain consciousness. When he was able to speak again he suggested I accompany him to the Zoological Gardens where some of his disciples wanted to take him to see the lions. The manner in which he expressed his joy at the thought of seeing the lions was charming in its simplicity. Repeatedly he asked if I would like to see the lions, the celebrated riding beasts of the goddess Durga. I smiled and said, "I have seen the lions several times." To which he replied, "Wouldn't it be a pleasure to go with me to see them once more?" I said: "Yes, it would be a great pleasure, no doubt, but unfortunately I have another engagement. However, I shall accompany you to Sukeas Street in Calcutta and then shall send for Naren (subsequently known as Vivekananda) and he will take you to the Zoological Gardens."

So it was arranged, and a carriage was brought by a young disciple, who, as far as I remember, became our fellow-passenger in the carriage. ... As we rode along, Ramakrishna fell into an ecstatic state, and then I witnessed a scene that I shall never forget. His whole countenance was aglow with a strange spiritual light, and before he became fully unconscious he began to pray incoherently in the following fashion: "Oh Mother, my beloved Mother, do not make me unconscious. Oh Mother! I am going to see the lions in the Zoological Gardens. Oh Mother, I may have a fall from the carriage. Do, do let me be all right until

the journey is finished." At this point he became thoroughly unconscious, leaning on my arm for a few minutes. After consciousness returned he once again began conversing in his usual, childlike, simple manner until we reached Sukeas Street and Naren was sent for. As far as I remember, Naren came at once, took my place in the carriage, and went with his Master to the Gardens.

But when I received the news of his rapidly declining health, I left all work and went to Dakshineswar. I found him very low. That was before he moved to the Cossipore garden house. Ramakrishna took me to task for neglecting him. I pleaded guilty to the charge and made a clean breast of it by letting him know the exact causes. I smiled and said, "As there are many editions of a book, so there have been many editions of God, and your disciples are about to make you a new one." He too smiled and said: "Just fancy, God Almighty dying of throat cancer. What great fools these fellows must be!" That was my last interview with him, after which he left Dakshineswar, was placed under the treatment of the most distinguished physicians in town, and was devotedly nursed by his disciples. But nothing could stay the progress of his disease, and he passed away leaving behind him a memory that is. now spiritually feeding hundreds of earnest souls. My acquaintance with him, though short, was fruitful and strengthened many a spiritual thought in me. I owe him a debt of gratitude for the sincere affection he bore towards me. He was certainly one of the remarkable personalities I have come across in my life.

ASWINI KUMAR DATTA

(From: *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna,* tr. by Swami Nikhilananda (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York), 1969)

Aswini Kumar Datta (1856-1923) was known as a great educationist, patriot, and lover of God. Through the Brajamohan Institute, which was founded and conducted by him, he inspired and trained many young students. He also led boycott movements and wrote several books on love of God, including Bhaktiyoga, *which is still widely read today.*

It was probably during the autumn holidays of 1881 that I met Sri Ramakrishna the first time. I arrived at Dakshineswar in a country boat and, going up the steps of the landing-ghat, asked someone where the Paramahansa was.

"There is the Paramahansa," was the reply. A man was pointed out on the

north verandah, which faces the garden. He was sitting reclining against a bolster. He wore a black-bordered cloth. At the sight of the bolster and the black-bordered cloth I said to myself, “What kind of Paramahansa is this?”[1]

Going nearer, I found him half leaning against the bolster with his hands clasped around his drawn-up knees. Then I thought: “Evidently he is not used to pillows as gentlemen are. So perhaps he is the Paramahansa.” At his right, very near the pillow, sat a gentleman whose name, I came to know, was Rajendra Lal Mittra, later an Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. A little farther off sat some others.

After a few moments the Master said to Rajendra Babu, “See whether Keshab is coming.” Evidently Keshab Sen was expected that day.

Someone walked away a few steps and, coming back, said, “No, he isn’t.”

After a brief interval, hearing a sound outside, he said, “Please look once more.”

Again someone went out and came back with the same reply.

Then Sri Ramakrishna laughed and said, quoting a popular saying, “The leaves rustle outside, and Radha says, ‘Oh, here comes my Sweetheart!’” Continuing, he said: “You see, Keshab always tantalizes me like this. It is his way.”

At dusk Keshab came with his party. Keshab bowed low before the Master, touching the ground with his forehead. The Master returned his salutation in the same manner.

Shortly afterwards Sri Ramakrishna said, in a state of partial consciousness: “Look! He has brought the whole Calcutta crowd. I am supposed to deliver a lecture. I won’t do anything of the sort. Do it yourself if you like. Lecturing is none of my business.”

Still in the ecstatic mood, he said with a divine smile: “I shall eat, drink, and be merry. I shall play and sleep. But I can’t give lectures.”

As Keshab Babu watched him, he became overpowered with divine emotion. Every now and then he said, “Ah me! Ah me!”

I too watched the Master and said to myself, “Can this be pretence?” I had never seen anything like it before.

Coming back from samadhi, the Master said to Keshab: “Keshab, once I went to your temple. In the course of your preaching I heard you say, ‘We shall dive into the river of devotion and go straight to the Ocean of Satchidananda.’ At once I looked up at the gallery where Keshab’s wife and the other ladies were sitting and thought, Then what will become of these ladies?’ You see, Keshab, you are householders. How can you reach the Ocean of Satchidananda all at once? You are like a mongoose with a brick tied to its tail. When something

frightens it, it runs up the wall and sits in a niche. But how can it stay there any length of time? The brick pulls it down and it falls to the floor with a thud. You may practise a little meditation, but the .Weight of wife and children will pull you down. You may dive into the river of devotion, but you must come up again. You will alternately dive and come up. How can you dive and disappear once for all?"

Keshab Babu said: "Can't a householder ever succeed? What about Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore?"

Twice or thrice the Master repeated softly, "Devendra Nath Tagore — Devendra — Devendra" and bowed to him several times.

Then he said: "Let me tell you a story. A man used to celebrate the Durga Puja at his house with great pomp. Goats were sacrificed from sunrise to sunset. But after a few years the sacrifice was not so imposing. Then someone said to him, 'How is it, sir, that the sacrifice at your place has become such a tame affair?' 'Don't you see?' he said. 'My teeth are gone now.' Devendra is now devoted to meditation and contemplation. It is only natural that he should be, at his advanced age. But no doubt he is a great man.

"You see, as long as a man is under maya's spell, he is like a green coconut. When you scoop out the soft kernel from a green coconut, you cannot help scraping a little of the shell at the same time. But in the case of a ripe and dry coconut, the shell and kernel are separated from each other. When you shake the fruit you can feel the kernel rattling inside. The man who is freed from maya is like a ripe and dry coconut. He feels the soul to be separated from the body. They are no longer connected with each other.

"It is the I that creates all the trouble. Won't this wretched ego ever leave a person? You see a peepal tree growing from the rubbish of a tumbledown house. You cut it down today, but tomorrow you find a new sprout shooting up. It is the same with the ego. You may wash seven times a cup that onions have been kept in, but the wretched smell never leaves it."

In the course of the conversation he said to Keshab: "Well, Keshab, I understand that your Calcutta babus say that God does not exist. Is that true? A Calcutta babu wants to climb the stairs. He takes one step, but before taking the next he cries out: 'Oh, my side! My side!' and drops down unconscious. His relatives raise a hue and cry and send for a doctor, but before the doctor arrives the man is very likely dead. And people of such stamina say, 'There is no God'!"

After an hour or so the kirtan began. What I saw then I shall never forget either in this life or in the lives to come. Everybody danced, Keshab included. The Master was in the centre. All danced around him in a circle. During the dancing Sri Ramakrishna suddenly stood motionless, transfixed in samadhi. A

long time passed this way. After hearing his words and seeing all this, I said to myself, “Yes, a Paramahansa indeed!”

I visited him another day. When I bowed down to him and took a seat, he said, “Can you bring me some of that stuff—a little sour, a little sweet—that begins to fizz when you push down the cork?”

Myself: “Lemonade?”

Master: “Why don’t you bring a bottle for me?”

I think I brought him a bottle. So far as I remember, I was alone with him that day. I asked him a few questions.

Myself: “Do you observe caste?”

Master: “How can I say yes? I ate curry at Keshab Sen’s house. Let me tell you what once happened to me. A man with a long beard brought some ice here, but I didn’t feel like eating it. A little later someone brought me a piece of ice from the same man, and I ate it with great relish. You see, caste restrictions fall away of themselves. As coconut and palm trees grow up, the branches drop off of themselves. Caste conventions drop off like that.”

Myself: “What do you think of Keshab Babu?”

Master: “Oh, he is a saintly man.”

Myself: “And Trailokya Babu?”

Master: “A fine man. He sings very well.”

Myself: “Shivanath Babu?”

Master: “... A very good man. But he argues.”

Myself: “What is the difference between a Hindu and a Brahmo?”

Master: “There is not much difference. In the serenade we have here, one flutist plays a single note right along, while another plays various melodies. The Brahmos play one note, as it were; they hold to the formless aspect of God. But the Hindus bring out different melodies; that is to say, they enjoy God in his various aspects.

“The formless Deity and God with form may be likened to water and ice. The water freezes into ice. The ice melts into water through the heat of jnana [knowledge]. Water takes the form of ice through the cooling influence of bhakti.

“The Reality is one. People give It various names. Take the case of a lake with four landing-ghats on its four banks. People who draw waterat one ghat call it ‘jal,’ and those who draw it at the second ghat call it ‘pani.’ At the third ghat they call it ‘water,’ and at the fourth, ‘aqua.’ But it is one and the same thing: water.”

He asked me, “Have you seen my Panchavati?”

Myself: “Yes, sir.”

He told me a little of what he had practised there — his various religious austerities. He also told me about Nangta (Tota Puri).

Then I asked him, “How can I realize God?”

Master: “You see, he is constantly attracting us, as a magnet attracts iron. But the iron cannot come to the magnet if it is covered with dirt. When the dirt,is washed away, the iron is instantly drawn to the magnet. Weep for God and the tears will wash away the dirt from your mind.”

As I was writing down his words, he remarked: “Look here. Only repeating the word *siddhi* will not produce intoxication. You must actually get some hemp, rub it in water, and then drink the solution....”

Later he said: “Since you are going to lead a householder’s life, create a roseate intoxication in your mind with the thought of God. You will be doing your duties, but let that pleasant intoxication remain with you. You cannot, of course, like Shukadeva, be so inebriated with the thought of God that you will lie naked and unconscious. As long as you have to live in the world, give God the power of attorney. Make over all your responsibilities to him. Let him do as he likes. Live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man’s house. She bathes her master’s children, washes them, feeds them, and takes affectionate care of them in many ways, as if they were her own children, but in her heart she knows very well that they do not belong to her. No sooner is she dismissed than all is over. She has no more relationship with the children.

“Before breaking open the jackfruit you should rub your hands with oil in order to protect them from the sticky juice. Likewise, protect yourself with the oil of devotion. Then the world will not cling to you and you will not be affected by it.”

All this time Sri Ramakrishna was seated on the floor. Now he got up and stretched himself on his cot.

He said to me, “Fan me a little.”

I began to fan him and he was silent.

After a while he said: “Oh, it’s so hot! Why don’t you dip the fan in water?”

“Ah!” I said. “You have your fancies, too!”

The Master smiled and drawled out, “And—why—not?”

“Very well!” I said. “Have your full measure of them.”

I cannot express in words how immensely I enjoyed his company that day.

The last time I visited him I had with me the headmaster of our school, who had just then graduated. As soon as Sri Ramakrishna saw him, he asked me:

“Where did you pick him up? He’s a fine fellow!”

Then he continued: “You are a lawyer. You are very clever. Can you give me a little of your cleverness? The other day your father came here and stayed three days.”

Myself: “How did you find him?”

Master: “A nice man. But now and then he talks nonsense.”

Myself: “Please help him get over it when you see him next.”

At this Sri Ramakrishna smiled a little.

Myself: “Please give us a few instructions.”

Master: “Do you know Hriday?”

Myself: “Your nephew? I know him only by name.”

Master: “Hriday used to say to me: ‘Uncle, please don’t give out your stock of instructions all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?’ I would reply: ‘You fool, what’s that to you? These are my words and if I like I shall repeat them a hundred thousand times. You keep quiet!’

Myself *(smiling):* “Exactly so!”

A little later he sat up on the bed. He repeated “Om” several times and began to sing a song whose first line is: “Dive deep, O mind, dive deep in the Ocean of God’s Beauty.”

Hardly had he sung one or two lines when he himself dived deep and was lost in samadhi.

When the samadhi was over, he began to pace the room and with both hands pulled up the cloth he was wearing till it reached his waist. One end of it was trailing on the floor and the other was hanging loose.

Nudging my companion, I whispered, “See how nicely he wears his cloth!”

A moment later he threw away the cloth, with the words: “Ugh! What a nuisance! Off with it!”

He began to pace up and down the room naked. From the northern end of the room he brought an umbrella and a stick, and asked us, “Are these yours?”

Scarcely had I replied no when he said: “I knew it. I can judge a man by his stick and umbrella. They must belong to that man who was here some time ago and swallowed a lot of my words without understanding them.”

A few minutes later he sat down, still naked, on the northern end of his cot, facing the west, and asked me, “Well, do you consider me ungentlemanly?”

Myself: “Of course not. You are a perfect gentleman. But why do you ask me that?”

Master: “You see, Shivanath and others don’t think I am a gentleman. When they come I have to wrap a cloth or something around me. Do you know Girish

Ghosh?”

Myself: “Which Girish Ghosh? The one who is in the theatre?”

Master: “Yes.”

Myself: “I have never seen him. But I know him by reputation.”

Master: “A good man.”

Myself: “They say he drinks.”

Master: “Let him! Let him! How long will he continue that? Do you know Narendra?”

Myself: “No, sir.”

Master: “I wish very much that you could meet him. He has passed the B. A. examination and is unmarried.”

Myself: “Very well, sir. I shall meet him.”

Master: “Today there will be a kirtan at Ram Datta’s house. You may meet him there. Please go there this evening.”

Myself :”All right.”

Master: “Yes, do. Don’t forget.”

Myself: “It is your command. Shall I not obey it? Surely I will go.”

He showed us the pictures in his room and asked me whether a picture of Buddha could be had.

Myself: “Very likely.”

Master: “Please get one for me.”

Myself: “Very well. I’ll bring one when I come again.”

But alas, I never”returned to Dakshineswar.

That evening I went to Ram Babu’s house and met Narendra. In one of the rooms the Master sat reclining against a pillow. Narendra sat at his right, and I in front.

He asked Narendra to talk with me. But Narendra said: “I have a bad headache today. I don’t feel like talking.”

I replied, “Then let us put it off until another day.”

And that came to pass in May or June of 1897, at Almora. The will of the Master had to be fulfilled, and it was fulfilled after twelve years. Ah, how happily I spent those few days with Swami Vivekananda at Almora! Sometimes at his house, sometimes at mine, and one day on the top of a hill with nobody accompanying us. I never met him after that. It was as if to fulfill the Master’s wish that we saw each other at Almora.

I saw the Master not more than four or five times, but in that short time we became so intimate that I felt as if we had been classmates. How much liberty I took while speaking with him! But no sooner had I left his presence than it

flashed on me: “Goodness gracious! Think where I have been!” What I saw and received in those few days has sweetened my whole life. That Elysian smile of his, laden with nectar, I have locked up in the secret closet of my memory. That is the unending treasure of a hapless person like myself. A thrill of joy passes through my heart when I think how a grain of the bliss shed from that laughter has been sweetening the lives of millions, even in distant America.

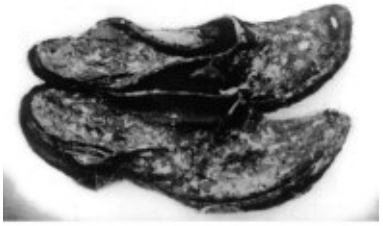
Thakur Sri Sri Ramakrishna (Photographed by Abinash Ch. Dawn in Oct. 1883 or after 2 Feb. 1884 on the forecourt of Radhakanta Temple, Dakshineswar)

Sri Ramakrishna in divine ecstasy at the residence of Keshab Chandra Sen on 21 September, 1879

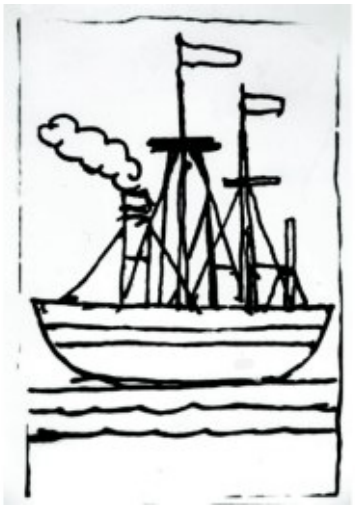
Closeup details of Sri Ramakrishna in divine ecstasy

Sri Ramakrishna at the Studios of Bengal Photographers, Calcutta on 10 December,1881

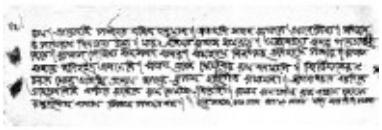
Articles used by Sri Ramakrishna



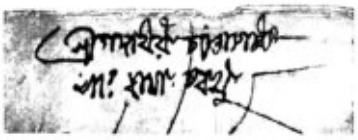
Sri Ramakrishna’s Slippers



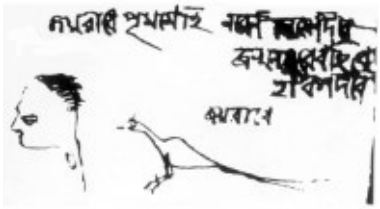
Drawing by Sri Ramakrishna (Boat)



Sri Ramakrishna’s handwriting



Sri Ramakrishna’s Signature



Sri Ramakrishna’s handwriting Which Says that Naren (Vivakananda) Would teach Whenever he Would go out and speak

Sri Ramakrishna dancing in ecstasy-sketch by Nandalal Bose

THE TEMPLE GARDEN OF DAKSHINESWAR

(A Short Description)

by M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta)

For thirty years (1855-1885) Sri Ramakrishna enacted his divine drama at the temple garden of Dakshineswar, so to the devotees of the Master every spot of this ground is holy. The tiled courtyard which Sri Ramakrishna crossed so many times, the porch where Swami Vivekananda had his famous first interview with the Master, the Kali temple where the Mother still stands just as she did when Sri Ramakrishna saw her come to life, the Panchavati where the Master practised his sadhana, the room where he lived and talked about God—these are well known to the devotees. They bring back vivid thoughts of their beloved Master, and they feel his presence.

In the eyes of the devotees Sri Ramakrishna is still in Dakshineswar and Dakshineswar is still as it was in the 1880s. Of course, due to the passing of time some minor changes have taken place in the temple garden.. The temples have deteriorated, most of the trees growing during the Master's time are now dead, and pilgrims have turned the solitary temple garden into a crowded place. Such changes are inevitable. But until we can see the Master and the temple garden truly as they were and always will be, we are thankful to M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta, the recorder of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) *for the following vivid account and description.*

Sri Ramakrishna in the Temple Garden

It is Sunday. The devotees have the day off, so they come in large numbers to the temple garden to visit Sri Ramakrishna. His door is open to everybody, and he talks freely with all, irrespective of caste or creed, sect or age. His visitors are monks, Paramahansas [illumined souls], Hindus, Christians, Brahmos, the followers of Shakti and Vishnu, men and women. Blessed was Rani Rashmani! She, out of her religious disposition, built this beautiful temple garden and brought Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of divinity, to this place. She made it possible for people to see and worship this God-man.

The Chandni [Porch] and Twelve Shiva Temples

The Kali temple of Dakshineswar is situated about five miles north of Calcutta

on the bank of the holy river Ganga. One can go there by boat and land on the broad brick steps of the ghat leading to the temple. Sri Ramakrishna used to bathe at this ghat. East of the landing is the chandni, or porch. The roof of this building resembles an awning and is supported by pillars. The chandni is used mainly at night by the temple guards on duty. Their camp cots, wooden boxes, and water pots are often found lying around. The gentlemen of the neighbourhood come here regularly and sit awhile before bathing in the holy water. They gossip as they rub themselves with oil. Many holy men and women belonging to various Hindu sects come to the temple for prasad [consecrated food] and wait at the chandni till the bell is rung. Sometimes one can see an ochre-robed Bhairavi [a nun of the tantric sect] seated there holding a trident, which is the symbol of her Order. She is also welcome to have her noon meal at the guesthouse. The chandni is located at the centre of twelve Shiva temples — six of them on the north and six on the south. Seeing the twelve temples from a distance, passengers in boats on the Ganga point out to one another: “Look! There is the temple garden of Rani Rashmani.”

Radhakanta Temple and the Courtyard

East of the chandni and twelve temples is a large tiled courtyard. There are two temples in the middle of the courtyard—the Radhakanta [Krishna] temple on the north side and the Kali [Divine Mother] temple on the south side. In the Radhakanta temple there are two images on the altar—Radha and Krishna—standing and facing west. Steps lead from the courtyard into the sanctuary. The floor of this temple is paved with marble. Chandeliers hang from the ceiling of the verandah. They are usually covered with red linen and used only during festive occasions. In front of the verandah is a row of columns. A guard sits at the entrance to the passage between two of these columns. In the afternoons the direct rays of the setting sun find their way into the sanctuary, so canvas screens have been placed between the columns. In the southeast corner of the verandah is a big jar containing holy water from the Ganga. Close to the threshold of the door leading into the sanctuary is a small brass vessel containing the sanctified water [charanamrita]. The devotees come, bow down to the deities, receive some drops of this sacred water in their right hand, and drink it with great reverence. Sri Ramakrishna’s first appointment as a priest was in this temple.

Kali Temple

South of the Krishna temple is the Kali temple. The beautiful image of the Divine Mother is made out of black stone and her name is “Bhavatarini,” or the

Saviour of the World. The floor of this temple is paved with white and black marble. A high altar, with steps to the south, is also made out of stone . Above this is a thousand-petalled lotus made out of silver, on which Lord Shiva is lying, with his head to the south and feet to the north. The image of Shiva is made of white marble. On his chest stands the beautiful three-eyed image of Mother Kali, wearing a Varanasi silk sari and various ornaments.

The Mother's feet are adorned with several kinds of anklets called *nupur, gujari, pancham, panjeb,* and *chutki.* The women of western India wear panjebs. As Sri Ramakrishna had a wish that the Mother should wsar panjebs, Mathur, the son-in-law of Rani Rashmani, bought them for her. The Mother's feet are also covered with scarlet hibiscus and fresh bel leaves touched with perfumed sandal paste. Her arms are adorned with various ornaments made of gold and set with jewels. On her lower arms are bracelets known as "coconut flowers," *paincha, bauti,* and *bala,* and on her upper arms are armlets called *tan, baju,* and *tabiz,* the last one having an attached pendant. Around her neck there is a gold *cheke,* a pearl necklace of seven strings, a gold necklace of thirty-two strings, a chain of stars, and a gold garland of human skulls. There is a gold crown on her head, and her ears are adorned with *kanbala, kanpash, phul-jhumko* [a type of earring that looks like flowers], *chaudani,* and golden fish. Her aquiline nose is adorned with a beautiful gold ring with a pearl-drop attached.

The Divine Mother has three eyes, the third one representing divine vision. And she has four arms. A sword is in her upper left hand and a human head is in her lower left hand. With her upper right hand she indicates to her devotees "do not fear," and with her lower right hand she offers boons. *[Thus the symbol of Kali reconciles both the terrible aspect and the benign aspect of life. The Divine Mother is even/thing — both good and evil. She also represents energy, which can be both constructive or destructive.]* Around her waist there is a girdle of sculptured human arms as well as gold waist-chains called *neem fruit* and *komarpata.*

In the northeast corner of the shrine is a bed on which the Mother takes her rest. A *chamar* [the white bushy tail of the chamari cow] hangs on the wall. Sri Ramakrishna fanned the Divine Mother with that chamar many times. On the step of the altar is a silver glass full of drinking water for the Mother. To the west of the lotus altar is a lion made of eight metals, and to the east, a trident and an image of an iguana. Southeast of the altar stands an image of a she-fox, to the south an image of a bull made of black stone, and to the northeast a swan. There is an emblem of Narayana [Vishnu] on a small silver throne placed on the step of the front altar. On one side of the altar there is an image of Ramlala [the child Ramachan-dra], made of eight metals, which Sri Ramakrishna received from a

monk, plus a small image, of Baneshwara Shiva and images of other deities. The Divine Mother stands facing the south.

The sacred pitcher has been installed in front of the Divine Mother [at the south of the altar]. This pitcher is filled with water and is decorated with vermillion, flowers, and a garland. It is the symbol of the All-Auspicious Mother. Near the north wall there is a copper vessel filled with holy water of the Ganga, which the Mother uses to wash her face. Above the image of the Mother is a beautiful canopy, and behind her is a piece of Varanasi silk embroidered with flowers of many colours. Around the four corners of the holy image are twelve silver columns on the dais. The elegant canopy adds greatly to the beauty of the image.

This is a medium-sized temple. The entrances to the shrine are protected by strong, heavy doors, and a guard sits near one of them. At the threshold there is a small brass vessel containing sanctified water, which has been offered at the time of worship. The roof of the temple is adorned with nine pinnacles — four at the lower level, four at the middle, and one at the top. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped in this temple.

Natmandir (Theatre Hall)

In front of the Kali temple and just to the south is the spacious natmandir. It is rectangular and the terrace is supported by both inner and outer rows of columns. Theatrical performances take place here on special occasions, especially during the night of Kali Puja. On the front side of the roof of the natmandir there are images of Shiva and his followers, Nandi and Bhringi. Sri Ramakrishna used to salute Lord Shiva with folded hands before entering the Mother’s temple, as if he were seeking his permission to enter the temple.

Storeroom, Kitchen, and Guesthouse

West of the courtyard is the row of twelve Shiva temples, and on the three other sides are rooms with connecting corridors. The rooms to the east are the storeroom, the room for preserving sweets and fruits, the room for preparing food offerings, the vegetarian kitchen for Krishna, the nonvegetarian kitchen for Kali, and the long corridor that is used as a dining hall. At noon, after the food has been offered to the deities, the prasad is distributed among the guests, beggars, and mendicants at the guesthouse. They all eat on leaf plates. If any guest or monk does not want cooked food, he can go to the temple manager and ask for rice, lentils, and other things. The manager then instructs the storekeeper to give him what he wants.

The manageg has his meals in his room. The owners of the Kali temple, who are descendants of Rani Rashmani, occasionally come to Dakshineswar and live in the *kuthi* [mansion], and they are served their meals there.

Office Quarters

On the south side of the courtyard is a row of rooms which are for the temple officers. The manager and cashier are always there. The storekeepers, servants, maidservants, priests, cooks, guards, and visitors are also to be seen moving around the office area. Some of these rooms are kept locked. They are storage places for sacred utensils, furniture, carpets, the canopy for the courtyard, and so on. A few of them were used as storerooms on the occasion of the birth anniversary festival held in honour of Sri Ramakrishna. The cooking for this great festival was done on the adjoining yard south of the office rooms.

On the north side of the courtyard there is a series of rooms, and the main entrance to the courtyard is in the middle. As at the chandni, guards are stationed here. People take off their shoes before entering the inner temple compound.

Sri Ramakrishna's Room

In the northwest corner of the courtyard and immediately to the north of the row of twelve Shiva temples is the well-known room where [for 14 years] Sri Ramakrishna passed his days in communion with God. To the west of this room is a semicircular verandah. Standing here facing west, Sri Ramakrishna would watch the holy river Ganga flow by. In front of the verandah is a narrow garden path running from north to south. On the other side of this path is the flower garden and then the embankment. From here, one can hear the sweet, melodious murmuring of the Ganga.

Nahabat (The Music Tower) and Bakul-tala

To the north of Sri Ramakrishna's room is a rectangular verandah, and next to that is a garden path running from east to west. North of this path is a flower garden, and on the other side of that the nahabat. Sri Ramakrishna's mother lived in the lower room [in another version, the upper room] of the nahabat, and later Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, lived there. West of the nahabat are a bakul tree and a bathing ghat. The women of the neighbourhood bathe at this ghat. In 1877 Sri Ramakrishna's aged mother passed away there. Following the Hindu custom, the Master's dying mother was taken to this ghat and the lower half of her body was immersed in the holy water of the Ganga. She breathed her last in the presence of her weeping son.

There is a second nahabat [music tower] in the southwest corner of the temple garden, next to the office rooms.

Panchavati

A little north of the bakul tree is the Panchavati. This is a grove of five trees—banyan, pipal, ashoka, amlaki, and bel—which were planted under Sri Ramakrishna's supervision. After returning from his pilgrimage [in 1868] he spread the holy dust of Vrindaban around this place. The Master practised various kinds of sadhana [disciplines] in the Panchavati grove, sometimes going there alone at night. Later he often accompanied the devotees as they walked around the holy spot. East of the Panchavati is a thatched hut [now, a brick room], in which Sri Ramakrishna practised meditation and austerities (Advaita sadhana under Tota Puri).

Next to the Panchavati is an old banyan tree which has grown around a pipal tree, both looking as if they were one tree. The banyan is an ancient tree, and as a result there are many holes in it which are the homes of birds and other animals. Around this tree is a circular brick platform with steps on two sides — north and south. The platform is used by people who visit the temple garden and especially by those who wish to sit in solitude and meditate on God with the holy Ganga flowing before them. Sri Ramakrishna used to sit on the northwest corner of the platform and practise various kinds of spiritual disciplines. He would cry to the Divine Mother with a longing heart, as the cow longs for her calf.

Recently a branch of the pipal tree fell on this holy platform, though the branch had not been completely severed from the main tree. It seems that no other great soul has yet been born to sit there. Is that why nature is guarding this spot with the broken branch?

Jhau-tala [Pine grove] and Bel-tala

Going a little north of the Panchavati one reaches a fence of iron wire. North of this fence is the pine grove — a collection of four pine trees. Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees would use this place to answer the call of nature.

East of the pine grove is the bel-tala. Sitting under this bel tree, Sri Ramakrishna practised many difficult disciplines [especially tantric sadhanas under the guidance of Bhairavi Brahmani]. To the north of the pine grove and bel tree is the high boundary wall of the temple garden, and on the other side of the wall is a government magazine.

Kuthi [Mansion]

Coming out of the temple courtyard through the northern portico, one comes across a two-storied mansion called the kuthi. Whenever Rani Rashmani or her son-in-law Mathur and other relatives came to visit Dakshineswar, they stayed in this kuthi. During their lifetime Sri Ramakrishna lived [for 16 years] in a room on the west side of the ground floor of this mansion. From this room one can go to the bakul-tala ghat and have a very good view of the Ganga.

Gazi-tala and the Main Gate of the Temple Garden

There is a path running east to west between the northern portico of the courtyard and the kuthi. While walking east, one can see a beautiful pond with a concrete ghat on the right side. There is another ghat for this pond on the eastern side of the Kali temple, which is used to clean the sacred utensils and dishes. A pipal tree is next to the northern ghat. This place is called Gazi-tala. Long ago an old Muslim saint lived here, passing his days in the contemplation of God. His departed spirit is worshipped even today by Hindus and Muslims who live near the temple. *[At Gazi-tala Sri Ramakrishna practised Islamic sadhana under the guidance of a Sufi named Govinda Roy.]*

The main gate of the temple garden is a little east of the Gazi-tala. People who come from Alambazar or Calcutta enter the temple compound through this gate, and the people of Dakshineswar come through the northeastern gate, which is a little north of the main gate. A guard protects the main gate. When the Master would return late from Calcutta by carriage, sometimes even at midnight, the guard at the main gate would unlock the gate for him. Then the Master would invite the guard to his room and feed him fried bread and sweets which had been sent as prasad.

Goose Pond, Cowshed, and the Back Gate

There is another pond, called the goose pond, east of the Panchavati, and northeast of this are the stables and the cowshed. East of the cowshed is the back gate, or the northeastern gate, used by the people of Dakshineswar and by workers of the temple who live in the village with their families. Those without families live in quarters within the temple compound.

Flower Gardens

There is a narrow path running from the southern extremity of the temple garden straight north to the Panchavati. This path runs along the bank of the

Ganga and has flowering plants on both sides. Another garden path runs from the west to the main gate on the east, between the temple complex and the kuthi. This path also is lined on both sides with flowering plants.

A third garden path begins at the Gazi-tala on the south and runs to the cowshed on the north. It is situated east of the *kuthi* and goose pond. The garden to the east of this path contains many flowering plants and fruit trees as well as a pond.

Early in the morning, before the eastern horizon becomes red, the morning service *[mangala-arati]* to the Divine Mother begins with the sweet sound of temple bells. In the nahabat, morning melodies are then played on the flageolet to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. These are welcome sounds of love and joy to all, for the Mother of the Universe has awakened to bless her beloved children. Gardeners also start picking flowers for the worship of the deities at this time.

On the bank of the Ganga and just to the west of the Panchavati are a bel tree and a sweet-scented, milk-white *gulchi* flower tree. Sri Ramakrishna was very fond of *mallika* [a type of jasmine], *madhavi,* and *gulchi.* He brought a *madhavi* plant [a flowering creeper which Radha liked] from Vrindaban and planted it in the Panchavati. East of the goose pond and the *kuthi* is another pond around which are many flowering plants such as the *champak,* the five-faced hibiscus, the pendant hibiscus [resembling earrings], roses, and the *kanchan* [gold]. On a fence there is an *aparajita* [a blue flower used in the worship of the Divine Mother], and nearby are jasmine and *shefalika.*

West of the twelve Shiva temples, there are many flowering trees such as the white oleander, red oleander, rose, jasmine, and double-petalled jasmine. Also growing there are *dhutura* flowers, which are used for the worship of Shiva. Tulsi [basil] plants grow in brick vases between these flowering trees.

South of the nahabat are more double-petalled jasmine as well as other varieties of jasmine, gardenias, and roses. Two more flowering trees grow near the chandni ghat: the lotus oleander and the *kokilaksha,* or cuckoo-eyed flower. The colour of the latter resembles that of the eyes of a cuckoo. West of the Master’s room there are quite a few plants: *Krishna-churn,* double-petalled jasmine, jasmine, gardenia, *mallika,* roses, hibiscus, white oleander, red oleander, five-faced hibiscus, china-rose, and so on.

Formerly Sri Ramakrishna picked flowers for worship. One day when he was plucking bel leaves from a bel tree near the Panchavati, a layer of bark came off the tree. At that moment he experienced that God, who dwells in every being and everything, must have felt pain at this. He never again picked bel leaves for worship. Another day while picking flowers he had a vision: He saw that the

flowers of each tree formed a bouquet and all those bouquets hung around the neck of the cosmic form of Shiva. Thus he experienced that the worship of God is going on day and night. After that experience he could no longer pick flowers.

The Two Verandahs Adjacent to Sri Ramakrishna's Room

East of Sri Ramakrishna's room there is a verandah facing the temple courtyard. The Master used to sit here with the devotees and talk to them about God or sing kirtan. Another verandah is opposite this one, facing the north. Here the devotees used to celebrate the Master's birthday. They would sing devotional songs in chorus and eat prasad with him. Keshab Chandra Sen and his followers often met with the Master here to talk about God. Afterwards the Master would feed them puffed rice, coconut, fried bread [luchi], and sweets. On this same spot Sri Ramakrishna, seeing Narendra fSwami Vivekananda], went into samadhi.

The Abode of Bliss

The temple garden of Dakshineswar has become an abode of bliss. Daily worship with food offerings is done to the presiding deities of the temple garden—Bhavatarini Kali, Shiva, and Radha-Krishna. Guests and mendicants are well taken care of. On the west side one can have a view of the holy Ganga, and on the other side a view of the flower garden—full of various colours and sweet fragrances. In the midst of these surroundings lived an illumined person, absorbed in divine ecstasy day and night.

The Blissful Mother's endless festival is going on in this temple garden. Various kinds of melodies that are played in the nahabat reverberate through the garden, beginning early in the morning at mangalaarati. The music resumes at 9:00 A.M. when the worship begins, again at 12 noon during the food offering to the deities, at 4:00 P.M. when the temples are opened after the noon rest, then during the vesper service, and at last at 9:00 P.M. during the evening food offering. After this the priests put the deities to bed. The sacred music reminds us day and night that our Mother not only has created us but is constantly looking after us.

[From: Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, by M. (Mahendra Nath Gupta) (Kathamrita Bhavan, Calcutta), vol. 1,1961]

Sri Ramakrishna by Frank Dvorak

Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Tadatmananda

Sri Ramakrishna by Swami Tadatmananda

Harmony of Religions-Sri Ramakrishna Showing Keshab Chandra Sen

Early picture of Cossipore garden house

Sri Ramakrishna’s Bedroom at Cossipore Garden House Where he renounced his mortal coil on 16 August , 1886

The Holy Mother Sarada Devi (photographed by Harrington at 10/2 Bosepara Lane,Calcutta in November 1898)

The Holy Mother at Jairambati, 1913 (photographed by Brahmachari Ganendranath)

MA-the idol of Womanhood at Jairambati, 1913 (photographed by Brahmachari Ganendranath)

The Universal Mother

THE GREAT STORY TELLER
PARABLES AND TALES OF THE MASTER

The abstruse ideas of religion and philosophy have an unerring appeal when clothed in homely imagery. Great truths are easily comprehended when expressed through a simple figure or similitude. The homeliness of the outer crust endows the core of the teaching with an effortless familiarity, ensuring its usefulness in the day to day life of religious practice. Parables therefore occupy a most important place in the teachings of the saints and seers. Jesus and Muhammad, Buddha, and the Vedic Sages have again and again adopted the allegorical method of presentation as an effective way of religious instruction. In this respect they have widely differed from professional philosophers and theologians. The Bible tells us that when Jesus delivered one of his parables, 'the people were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes'. The directness of appeal inherent in parables is well borne out by this observation. Another point about the way in which the great Teachers taught deserves mention here. When Jesus taught the gathered, crowd his first parable, he was questioned by his disciples as to the propriety of speaking to the multitude in parables. His reply was that by so doing he had thrown a veil over the inner import, making it difficult of comprehension by all except those who really cared to understand. This should not be taken as an indication of a narrow conservatism in his outlook; on the contrary, it points out only the excellence of the methodology adopted by true and great Teachers of men. Easy winning makes the prize always cheap. The Mahabharata hands down to us an ancient tradition which advises teachers to part with the great truths of religion only to earnest enquirers. The motive of Jesus was not different from this. Sri Ramakrishna, the spiritual teacher par excellence that he was, however, does not make any effort to make his parables obscure; the morals they convey lie on the surface. Many of his parables are drawn from ordinary domestic and social life, customary with the people who lived around him. Some he had devised on the model of Puranic stories. But all have a humorous vein and bear witness to his consummate wit and keenness of observation. We hope this collection of the parables published for the first time in separate book form will be of service to all who wish to get some acquaintance with the fundamentals of spiritual life through the interesting medium, of parables and stories.

The nectar of your story, the praise of poet-seers, Elixir to parched souls, delight of listening ears,

The cleanser out of sin, is grand and glorious; They who spread it wide on earth are generous.

—Srimad Bhagavata X, xxxi 9

In The Forest of The World

Once, a man was going through a forest, when three robbers fell upon him and robbed him of all his possessions. One of the robbers said, “What’s the use of keeping this man alive?” So saying, he was about to kill him with his sword, when the second robber interrupted him, saying: ‘Oh, no! What is the use of killing him? Tie his hand and foot and leave him here.” The robbers bound his hands and feet and went away. After a while the third robber returned and said to the man: “Ah, I am sorry. Are you hurt? I will release you from your bonds.” After setting the man free, the thief said: “Come with me. I will take you to the public high way.” After a long time they reached the road. At this the man said: “Sir, you have been very good to me. Come with me to my house.” “Oh, no!” the robber replied. “I can’t go there. The police will know it.” This world itself is the forest. The three robbers prowling here are Satva, Rajas, and Tamas. It is they that rob a man of the Knowledge of Truth. Tamas wants to destroy him. Rajas binds him to the world. But Satva rescues him from the clutches of Rajas and Tamas. Under the protection of Satva, man is rescued from anger, passion and other evil effects of Tamas. Further, Satva loosens the bonds of the world. But Satva also is a robber. It cannot give man the ultimate Knowledge of Truth, though it shows him the road leading to the Supreme Abode of God. Setting him on the path, Satva tells him: “Look yonder. There is your home.” Even Satva is far away from the knowledge of Brahman.

What The World Makes of Men

As a boy, at Kamarpukur, I loved Ram Mallick dearly. But afterwards, when he came here, I couldn’t touch him. Ram Mallick and I were great friends during our boyhood. We were together day and night; we slept together. At that time I was sixteen or seventeen years old. People used to say, “If one of them were a woman they would marry each other.” Both of us used to play at his house I remember those days very well. His relatives used to come riding in palanquins. Now he has a shop at Chanak. I sent for him many a time; he came here the other day and spent two days. Ram said he had no children; he brought up his nephew, but the boy died. He told me this with a sigh; his eyes were rilled with tears; he was grief stricken for his nephew. He said further that since they had no children of their own, all his wife’s affection had been turned to the nephew. She was completely overwhelmed with grief. Ram said to her: “You are crazy. What

will you gain by grieving? Do you want to go to Benares?" You see, he called his wife crazy. Grief for the boy totally 'diluted' him. I found he had no stuff within him. I couldn't touch him.

There is Need for Everything

Wicked People are needed too. At one time the tenants of an estate became unruly. The landlord had to send Golak Choudhury, who was a ruffian. He was such a hard administrator that the tenants trembled at the very mention of the name. There is need for everything. Once Sita said to her husband: "Rama, it would be grand if every house in Ayodhya were a mansion! I find many houses are old and dilapidated." "But, my dear," said Rama, "If all the houses were beautiful ones, what would the masons do?" God has created all kinds of things. He has created good trees and poisonous plants and weeds as well. Among the animals there are good, bad, and all kinds of creatures—tigers, lions, snakes, and so on.

There are Men and Men

MEN may be divided into four classes: those bound by the fetters of the world, the seekers after liberation, the liberated and the ever-free. Among the ever-free we may count sages like Narada. They live in the world for the good of others, to teach men spiritual truths. Those in bondage are sunk in worldliness and are forgetful of God. Not even by mistake do they think of God. The seekers after liberation want to free themselves from attachment to the world. Some of them succeed and others do not. The liberated souls, such as the Sadhus and Mahatmas, are not entangled in the world, in 'woman and gold.' Their minds are free from worldliness. Besides they always meditate on the Lotus Feet of God. Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it, and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that straggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, 'Look! There goes a big one!' But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking, 'We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.' But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

The Root of all Troubles

In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish, about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the crows followed it. The kite flew to the south and the crows followed it there. The kite flew to the north and still the crows followed after it. The kite went east and west, but with the same result. As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: 'That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace.' As long as a man has the fish, that is, worldly desires, he must perform actions and consequently suffer from worry, anxiety, and restlessness. No sooner does he renounce these desires than his activities fall away and he enjoys peace of soul.

The Tiger That Lurks Behind Worldly Joys

GOD is like the wish-yielding tree of the celestial world (Kalpataru), which gives whatever one asks of it. So, one should be careful to give up all worldly desires when one's mind has been purified by religious exercises. Just listen to a story: A certain traveller came to a large plain in the course of his travels. As he had been walking in the sun for many hours, he was thoroughly exhausted and heavily perspiring; so he sat down in the shade of a tree to rest a little. Presently he began to think what a comfort it would be if he could but get a soft bed there to sleep on. He was not aware that he was sitting under the celestial tree. As soon as the above thought rose in his mind, he found a nice bed by his side. He felt much astonished, but all the same stretched himself on it. Now he thought to himself, how pleasant it would be, were a young damsel to come there and gently stroke his legs. No sooner did the thought arise in his mind than he found a young damsel sitting at his feet and stroking his legs. The traveller felt supremely happy. Presently he felt hungry and thought: "I have got whatever 1 have wished for; could I not then get some food?" Instantly he found various kinds of delicious food spread before him. He at once fell to eating, and having helped himself to his heart's content, stretched himself again on his bed. He now began to revolve in his mind the events of the day. While thus occupied, he thought: "If a tiger should attack me all of a sudden!" In an instant a large tiger jumped on him and broke his neck and began to drink his blood. In this way the traveller lost his life. Such is the fate of men in general. If during your meditation you pray for men or money or worldly honours, your desires will no

doubt be satisfied to some extent; but, mind you, there is the dread of the tiger behind the gifts you get. Those tigers—disease, bereavements, loss of honour and wealth etc,—are a thousand times more terrible than the live tiger.

That Oppressing Stench of Worldliness

Once, a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time! She was restless and began to fidget about. Her hostess saw her condition and said, "Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?" The fishwife said: "I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep." The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.

The Jar of Desire Can Never be Filled Up

A barber who was passing under a haunted tree, heard a voice say, "Will you accept seven jars full of gold?" The barber looked around, but could see no one. The offer of seven jars of gold, however, roused his cupidity, and he cried aloud, "Yes, I shall accept the seven jars." At once came the reply, "Go home, I have carried the jars to your house." The barber ran home in hot haste to verify the truth of this strange announcement. And when he entered the house, he saw the jars before him. He opened them and found them all full of gold, except the last one which was only half-full. A strong desire now arose in the barber's mind to fill the seventh jar also, for without it his happiness was incomplete. He therefore converted all his ornaments into gold coins and put them into the jar; but the mysterious vessel was, as before, unfilled. This exasperated the barber. Starving himself and his family, he saved some amount more and tried to fill the jar; but the jar remained as before. So one day he humbly requested the king to increase his pay, as his income was not sufficient to maintain himself. Now the barber was a favourite of the king, and as soon as the request was made the king doubled his pay. All this pay he saved and put into the jar, but the greedy jar showed no signs of filling. At last he began to live by begging from door to door, and his professional income and the income from begging—all went into the insatiable cavity of the mysterious jar. Months passed, and the condition of the miserable and miserly barber grew worse every day. Seeing his sad plight the king asked him one day: "Hallo! When your pay was half of what yon now get,

you were happy, cheerful and contented; but with double that pay, I see you morose, care-worn and dejected. What is the matter with you? Have you got ‘the seven jars’?” The barber was taken aback by this question and replied, “Your Majesty, who has informed you of this?” The king said: “Don’t you know that these are the signs of the person to whom the Yaksha consigns the seven jars. He offered me also the same jars, but I asked him whether this money might be spent or was merely to be hoarded. No sooner had I asked this question than the Yaksha ran away without any reply. Don’t you know that no one can spend that money? It only brings with it the desire of hoarding. Go at once and return the money.” The barber was brought to his senses by this advice, and he went to the haunted tree and said, “Take back your gold, O Yaksha.” The Yaksha replied, “All right.” When the barber returned home, he found that the seven jars had vanished as mysteriously as they were brought in, and with it had vanished, his life-long savings too. Those who do not understand the difference between what is real expenditure and what is real income, lose all they have.

Bhagavata in The Ear, Brothel in The Mind

Once, two friends were going along the street when they saw some people listening to a reading of the Bhagavata. “Come, friend,” said the one to the other, “let us hear the sacred book.” So saying, he went in and sat down. The second man peeped in and went away. He entered a house of ill fame. But very soon he felt disgusted with the place. “Shame on me!” he said to himself. “My friend has been listening to the sacred word of Hari and see where I am!” But the friend who had been listening to the Bhagavata also became disgusted. “What a fool I am!” he said. “I have been listening to this fellow’s blah-blah, and my friend is having a grand time.” In course of time they both died. The messenger of death came for the soul of one who had listened to the Bhagavata and dragged it off to hell. The messenger of God came for the soul of the one who had been to the house of prostitution and led it up to heaven. Verily, the Lord looks into a man’s heart and does not judge him by what he does or where he lives.

Greater Even Than The Guru!

A poor brahmana had a rich cloth merchant as his disciple. The merchant was very miserly by nature. One day the brahmana was in need of a small piece of cloth for covering his sacred book. He went to his disciple and asked for the required piece of cloth; but the merchant replied: “I am very sorry, sir. Had you told me of this a few hours earlier, I would have given you the thing wanted. Unfortunately, now I have no small piece of cloth which will answer your purpose. However, I shall remember your requirement, but please remind me of

it now and then." The brahmana had to go away disappointed. This conversation between the guru and his worthy disciple was overheard by the wife of the latter from behind a screen. She at once sent a man after the brahmana, and calling him inside the house, said, "Revered Father, what is it that you were asking from the master of the house?" The brahmana related all what had happened. The wife said: "Please go home sir; you will get the cloth tomorrow morning." When that merchant returned home at night the wife asked him, "Have you closed your shop?" The merchant said, "Yes, what is the matter?" She said, "Go at once and bring two cloths of the best quality in the shop." He said, "Why this hurry? I shall give you the best cloth tomorrow morning." The wife, however, insisted, "No, T must have them just now or not at all." What could the poor merchant do? The person whom he had now to deal with was not the spiritual guru whom he could send away with vague and indefinite promises, but the 'curtain guru' whose behests must be instantaneously obeyed, or else there would be no peace for him at home. At last the merchant, willingly enough, opened the shop, at that late hour of the night, and brought the cloths for her. Early next morning, the good lady sent the article to the guru with the message, "If in future you want anything from us, ask me, and you will get it."

How's a Fallen Sannyasi

Do you know how it looks for a Sannyasi to accept money or to be attached to an object of temptation? It is as if a brahmana widow who had practised continence and lived on simple boiled rice and vegetables and milk for many years, were suddenly to accept an untouchable as her paramour. There was a low-caste woman named Bhagi Teli in our part of the country. She had many disciples and devotees. Finding that she, a Sudra, was being saluted by people, the landlord became jealous and engaged a wicked man to tempt her. He succeeded in corrupting her and all her spiritual practice came to nothing. A fallen Sannyasi is like that.

If you Would Caonquer Lust, Look on Women as Mother

WHEN asked why he did not lead the life of a householder with his wife, the Master replied: 'Kartikeya (Son of Shiva) one day happened to scratch a cat with his nail. On going home, he saw that there was the mark of a scratch on the cheek of his Divine Mother, Parvati. Seeing this he asked her, 'Mother, low did you get this ugly scratch on your cheek?' The mother of the universe replied, 'This is the work of your own hand; it is the scratch of your nail.' Kartikeya asked in wonder: 'How is it, Mother? I do not remember to have scratched you

at any time.' The Mother replied, 'Darling, have you forgotten the fact of your loving scratched a cat this morning?' Kartikeya said, 'Yes, I did scratch a cat, but how did your cheek get the scar?' The Mother replied, 'Dear child, nothing exists in this world but Myself. The whole creation is Myself; whomsoever you may hurt, you only hurt me.' Kartikeya was greatly surprised to hear this; and then he determined never to marry. For, whom could he marry? Every woman was mother to him. Realizing thus the motherhood of woman, he gave up marriage. I am like Kartikeya. I consider every woman as my Divine Mother.

Money is Also a Great Upadhi

Money is also an Upadhi and that too of a very strong nature. As soon as a man becomes rich he is thoroughly changed.

A brahmana who was very meek and humble used to come here every now and then. After sometime he stopped coming and we knew nothing of what had happened to him. One day, we went over to Konnagore by boat. As we were getting down from the boat we saw the brahmana sitting on the bank of the Ganges, where, in the fashion of big folks, he was enjoying the pure air of the river. On seeing me he accosted me in a patronising tone with the words, "Hallo Thakur! How are you doing now?" At once 1 noticed a change in his tone and said to Hriday who was with me, "I tell you, Hriday, this man must have come by some riches. And change has come over him?" And Hriday burst into a loud laughter.The possession of money makes such a difference in a man!

Maya Vanishes The Moment it is Known

A priest was once going to the village of a disciple of his. He had no servant with him. Seeing a cobbler on the way, he addressed him, saying: "Hallo! Good man, will you accompany me as a servant? You will be fed well and taken good care of, if you come with me." The cobbler replied: "Sir, I am of the lowest caste. How can I come as your servant?" The priest said, "Never mind. Do not tell anybody what you are. Do not also speak to anyone, or make anybody's acquaintance. The cobbler agreed. At twilight, while the priest was sitting at prayers in the house of his disciple, another brahmana came and said to the priest's servant, "Go and bring my shoes from there." True to the behest of his master, he made no response. The brahmana repeated his order a second time, but even then the servant remained silent. The brahmana repeated it again and again, but the cobbler did not move an inch. At last, getting annoyed, the brahmana angrily said: "Sudra; how dare you disobey a bralimana's command? What is your name? Are you indeed a cobbler?" The cobbler, hearing this, began

to tremble with fear, and looking piteously at the priest, said: “O venerable sir, I am found out. I dare not stay here any longer. Let me flee.” So saying, he took to his heels.

Just so, as soon as Maya is recognised, she flies away.

The Prolonged Dream That We Call Life

There was a farmer who lived in the countryside. He was a real jnani. He earned his living by farming, He was married, and after many years a son was born to him, whom he named Haru. The parents loved the boy dearly. This was natural, since he was the one precious gem of the family. On account of his religious nature the farmer was loved by the villagers. One day he was working in the field when a neighbour came and told him that Haru had an attack of cholera. The farmer at once returned home and arranged for treatment for the boy. But Haru died. The other members of the family were grief-stricken, but the farmer acted as if nothing had happened. He consoled his family and told them that grieving was futile. Then he went back to his field. On returning home he found his wife weeping even more bitterly. She said to him: “How heartless you are! You haven’t shed one tear for the child.” The farmer replied quietly: “Shall I tell you why I haven’t wept? I had a very vivid dream last night. I dreamt I had become a king; I was the father of eight sons and was very happy with them. Then I woke up. Now I am greatly perplexed. Should I weep for those eight sons or for this one Haru?”The farmer was a jnani; therefore he realized that the waking state is as unreal as the dream state.

There is only one eternal substance, and that is the Atman.

A Siddha Stops The Storm

Once, a great Siddha was sitting on the sea-shore when there came a great storm. The Siddha, being greatly distressed by it, exclaimed, “Let the storm cease!” and his words were fulfilled. Just then a ship was going at a distance with all sails set, and as the wind suddenly died away, it capsized, drowning all who were on board the ship.

Now the sin of causing the death of so many persons accrued to the Siddha, and for this reason he lost all his occult powers and had to suffer in purgatory.

Occult Powers are More a Hindrance Than a Help to God-Vision

Once upon a time a sadhu acquired great occult powers. He was vain about them. But he was a good man and had some austerities to his credit. One day the Lord, disguised as a holy man, came to him and said, “Revered sir, I have heard

that you have great occult powers." The sadhu received the Lord cordially and offered him a seat. Just then an elephant passed by. The Lord, in the disguise of the holy man, said to the sadhu, "Revered sir, can you kill this elephant if you like?" The sadhu said, "Yes, it is possible." So saying he took a pinch of dust, muttered some mantras over it, and threw it at the elephant. The beast struggled a while in pain and then dropped dead. The Lord said: "What power you have! You have killed the elephant!" The sadhu laughed. Again the Lord spoke: "Now, can you revive the elephant?" "That too is possible," replied the sadhu. He threw another pinch of charmed dust at the beast. The elephant writhed about a little and came back to life. Then the Lord said: "Wonderful is your power. But may I ask you one thing? You have killed the elephant and you have revived it. But what has that done for you? Do you feel uplifted by it? Has it enabled you to realize God?" Saying this, the Lord vanished.

Subtle are the ways of Dharma. One cannot realize God. if one has even the least trace of desire. A thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle if it has the smallest fibre sticking out.

The Pundit Who Could Not Swim

Once, several men were crossing the Ganges in a boat. One of them, a pundit, was making a great display of his erudition, saying that he had studied various books—the Vedas, the Vedanta, and the six systems of philosophy. He asked a fellow passenger, "Do you know the Vedanta?" "No, revered sir." "The Samkhya and the Patanjala?" "No, revered sir." "Have you read no philosophy whatsoever?" "No, revered sir." The pundit was talking in this vain way and the passenger sitting in silence when a great storm arose and the boat was about to sink. The passenger said to the pundit, "Sir, can you swim?" "No", replied the pundit. The passenger said, "I don't know Samkhya or the Patanjala, but I can swim."

What will a man gain by knowing many scriptures? The one thing needful is to know how to cross the river of the world. God alone is real, and all else is illusory.

As One Thinks, So One Receives

A magician was showing his tricks before a king. Now and then he exclaimed: "Come confusion! Come delusion! O King, give me money! Give me clothes!" Suddenly his tongue turned upward and clove to the roof of his mouth. He experienced kumbhaka. He could utter neither word nor sound, and became motionless. People thought he was dead. They built a vault of bricks and buried him there in that posture. After a thousand years someone dug into the vault.

Inside it people found a man seated in samadhi. They took him for a holy man and worshipped him. When they shook him his tongue was loosened and regained its normal position. The magician became conscious of the outer world and cried, as he had a thousand years before: “Come confusion! Come delusion! O King, give me money! Give me clothes!”

God is the Kalpataru, the wish-fulfilling tree. You will certainly get whatever you ask of him. But you must pray standing near the Kalpataru. Only then will your prayer be fulfilled. But you must remember another thing. God knows our inner feeling. A man gets the fulfilment of the desire he cherishes while practising sadhana. As one thinks, so one receives.

Feigning Madness Too is Risky!

A certain person, deeply involved in debt, feigned madness to escape the consequences of his liabilities. Physicians failed to cure his disease, and the more he was treated for his ailments the greater became his madness. At last a wise physician found out the truth, and taking the feigning mad man aside, rebuked him saying: “My friend, what are you doing? Beware lest in feigning madness you become really mad. Already you have developed some genuine signs of insanity.” This sensible advice awoke the man from his folly, and he left off acting the part of a mad man.By constantly acting a thing, one actually becomes that.

Horses in Cowshed!

The instruction of a man who has not seen God does not produce the right effect. He may say one thing rightly, but he becomes confused about the next.

Samadhyayi delivered a lecture. He said, “God is beyond words and mind; He is dry. Worship Him through the bliss of your love and devotion. Just see, he thus described God, Whose very nature is Joy and Bliss! What will such a lecture accomplish? Can it teach people anything? Such a lecturer is like the man who said, “My uncle’s cowshed is full of horses.” Horses in cowshed! From that you understand that there were no horses at all.(.... Nor cows either!)

Those Fascinating Obstructions

Addressing a devotee named Mahendra Mukherjee, said Sri Ramakrishna: “You have no children. You do not serve anybody. And still you have no leisure! Goodness gracious!”

“You have no children to divert your mind. I know a deputy magistrate who draws a salary of eight hundred rupees a month. He went to Keshab’s house to

see a performance. I was there too. Rakhal and a few other devotees were with me and sat beside me. After a while Rakhal went out for a few minutes. The deputy magistrate came over and made his young son take Rakhal's seat. 1 said, 'He can't sit there.' At that time I was in such a state of mind that I had to do whatever the person next to me would ask me to do; so I had seated Rakhal (*later known as Swami Brahmananda, the first president of the Ramakrishna Order*) beside me. As long as the performance lasted the deputy did nothing but gibber with his son. The rascal didn't look at the performance even once. I heard, too, that he is a slave to his wife; he gets up and sits down as she tells him to. And he didn't see the performance for that snub-nosed monkey of a boy."

From 'Hamba' to 'Tuhu'

'The cow cries "Hamba"which means "I". That is why it suffers so much. It is yoked to the plough and made to work in rain and sun. Then it may be killed by the butcher. From its hide shoes are made, and also drums, which are mercilessly beaten. Still it does not escape suffering. At last strings are made out of its entrails for the bows used in carding cotton. Then it no longer says, 'Hamba! Hamba!', 'I', 'I', but 'Tuhu! Tuhu!', Thou! Thou!' Only then are its troubles over.

O Lord, I am the servant; Thou art the Master. I am the child; Thou art the Mother.Egotism is the cause of all suffering

When Shiva's Bull Bared its Teeth

GOD alone is the Doer, and we are all His instruments. Therefore, it is impossible even for a Jnani to be egotistic. The writer of a hymn to Shiva felt proud of his achievement; but his pride was dashed to pieces when Shiva's bull bared his teeth. He saw that each tooth was a word of the hymn.

Do you understand the meaning of this? These words had existed from the beginningless past. The writer had only discovered them.

How Vanity Turns a Person's Head!

Those who have read a few books cannot get rid of conceit. Once I had a talk with Kalikrishna Tagore about God. At once he said, "I know all about that." I said to him: "Does a man who had visited Delhi brag about that? Does a gentleman go about telling everyone that he is a gentleman?"

Oh, how vanity turns a person's head! There was a scavenger woman in the temple garden at Dakshineswar.

And her pride! And all for a few ornaments! One day a few men were passing

her on the path and she shouted to them, “Hey! Get out of the way, you people!” If a scavenger woman could talk that way, what can one say about the vanity of others?

Nothing is Lost in The Economy of God

There is a story about a man who practised Sava-sadhana. He worshipped the Divine Mother in a deep forest. First he saw many terrible visions. Finally a tiger attacked and killed him. Another man, happening to pass by and seeing the approach of the tiger, had climbed a tree. Afterwards he got down and found all the arrangements for worship at hand. He performed some purifying ceremonies and seated himself on the corpse. No sooner had he done a little Japa than the Divine Mother appeared before him and said: “My child, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from Me”. He bowed low at the Lotus Feet of the Goddess and said: “May I ask you one question, Mother? I am speechless with amazement at your action. The other man worked so hard to get the ingredients for Your worship and tried to propitiate You for such a long time, but You did not condescend to show him Your favour. And I, who don’t know anything of worship, who have done nothing, who have neither devotion nor knowledge nor love, and who haven’t practised any austerities, am receiving so much of Your grace?” The Divine Mother said with a smile, “My child you don’t remember your previous births. For many births you tried to propitiate Me through austerities. As a result of those austerities all these things have come to hand, and you have been blessed with My vision. Now ask me your boon.”

One must admit the existence of tendencies inherited from previous births.

This Faith of a Child

A boy named Jatila used to walk to school through the woods, and the journey frightened him. One day he told his mother of his fear. She replied: “Why should you be afraid? Call Madhusudana.” “Mother”, asked the boy, “Who is Madhusudana?” The mother said, “He is your Elder Brother.” One day after this, when the boy again felt afraid in the woods, he cried out, “O Brother Madhusudana!” But there was no response. He began to weep aloud: “Where are You, Brother Madhusudana? Come to me. I am afraid.” Then God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: “Here I am. Why are you frightened?” And so saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said: “I will come whenever you call me. Do not be afraid.” One must have this faith of a child, this yearning.

A Boy Actually Fed God

A Brahmana used to worship his family Deity with food offerings. One day he had to go away on business. As he was about to leave the house, he said to his son: “Give the offering to the Deity today. See that God is fed.” The boy offered food in the shrine, but the image remained silent on the altar. It would neither eat nor talk. The boy waited a long time, but still the image did not move. But the boy firmly believed that God would come down from His throne, sit on the floor, and partake of his food. Again and again he prayed to the Deity, saying: “O Lord, come down and eat the food. It is already very late. I cannot sit here any longer.” But the image did not utter a word. The boy burst into tears and cried: “O Lord, my father asked me to feed you. Why won’t you come down? Why won’t you eat from my hands?” The boy wept for some time with a longing soul. At last the Deity, smiling, came down from the altar and sat before the meal and ate it. After feeding the Deity, the boy came out of the shrine room. His relatives said: “The worship is over. Now bring away the offering.” “Yes,” said the boy, “the worship is over. But God has eaten everything.” “How is that?”, asked the relatives. The boy replied innocently, “Why, God has eaten the food.”

They entered the shrine and were speechless with wonder to see that the Deity had really eaten every bit of the offering.

A Disciple and her Pot of Curds

Once there was an annaprasana ceremony (the first offering of cooked rice to a baby) in a Guru’s house. His disciples volunteered, according to their powers, to supply the different articles of food. He had one disciple, a very poor widow, who owned a cow. She milked it and brought the Guru a jar of milk. He had thought she would take charge of all the milk and curd for the festival. Angry at her poor offering, he threw the milk away and said to her, “Go and drown yourself.’ The widow accepted this as his command and went to the river to drown herself. But God was pleased with her guileless faith and, appearing before her, said: “Take this pot of curd. You will never be able to empty it. The more curd you pour out, the more will come from the pot. This will satisfy your teacher.” The Guru was speechless with amazement when the pot was given to him. After hearing from the widow the story of the pot, he went to the river, saying to her, “I shall drown myself if you cannot show God to me.” God appeared then and there, but the Guru could not see Him. Addressing God, the widow said, “If my teacher gives up his body because Thou doth not reveal Thyself to Him, then I too shall die.” So God appeared to the Guru—but only

once.

Faith Absolute

Once, a young sannyasin went to a house to beg his meal. He had embraced the monastic life from his very boyhood and so had not much knowledge of the world, A young lady came out from the house to give him alms.

Seeing her breasts, the young sannyasin questioned her if she was suffering from boils on her chest. To that her mother replied: “No, my son, she hasn’t got any boil. A child will soon be born to her, and so God has provided her with two breasts to suckle the child. The child will suck milk from those breasts after it is born.” No sooner did the young sannyasin hear this than he exclaimed: “No more will I beg my meals. He, who has created me, will feed me too.”

Hanuman Singh and The Wrestler from The Punjab

At one time two men were engaged to wrestle. One of them was Hanuman Singh and the other a Mussulman from the Punjab. The Mussalman was a strong and stout man. He had eaten lustily of butter and meat for fifteen days before the day of the wrestling-match, and even on that day. All thought he would be the victor.

Hanuman Singh, on the other hand, clad in dirty cloth, had eaten sparingly for some days before the day of the match and devoted himself to repeating the holy name of Mahavir. On the day of the match he observed a complete fast. All thought he would surely be defeated.

But it was he who won, while the man who had feasted for fifteen days lost the fight.

The Love That Freely Giveth is The Highest

Pride once entered into the heart of Arjuna, the beloved friend of Sri Krishna. Arjuna thought that none equalled him in love and devotion to his Lord and Friend. The omniscient Lord, Sri Krishna, reading the heart of His friend, took him one day for a walk. They had not proceeded far when Arjuna saw a strange brahmana eating dry grass as food, but nevertheless had a sword dangling at his side. Arjuna at once knew him to be a holy and pious devotee of Vishnu, one whose highest religious duty was to injure no being. As even grass has life, he would not eat it green but sustained his life by eating it dry and lifeless. Yet he carried a sword.

Arjuna, wondering at the incongruity, turned towards the Lord and said: “How is this? Here is a man who has renounced all ideas of injuring any living being—

down to the meanest blade of grass; yet he carries with him a sword, the symbol of death and hatred!" The Lord said, "You had better ask the man yourself." Arjuna then went up to the brahmana and said; "Sir, you injure no living being, and you live upon dry grass. Why then do you carry this sharp sword?"

The brahmana: It is to punish four persons if I chance to meet them.

Arjuna: Who are they?

The brahmana: The first is the wretch Narada.

Arjuna: Why, what has he done?

The brahmana: Why, look at the audacity of that fellow; he is perpetually keeping my Lord awake with his songs and music. He has no consideration whatsoever for the comfort of the Lord. Day and night, in and out of season, he disturbs the peace of the Lord by his prayers and praises.

Arjuna: Who is the second person?

The brahmana: The impudent Draupadi!

Arjuna: What is her fault?

The brahmana: Look at the inconsiderate audacity of the woman! She was so rash as to call my beloved Lord just at the moment He was going to dine. He had to give up His dinner and go to the Kamyaka Yana to save the Pandavas from the curse of Durvasa. And her presumption went so far that she even caused my beloved Lord to eat the impure remnant of her own food.

Arjuna: Who is the third?

The brahmana: It is the heartless Prahlada. He was so cruel that he did not hesitate for a moment to ask my Lord to enter the boiling cauldron of oil, to be trodden under the heavy feet of the elephants and to break through an adamantine pillar.

Arjuna: Who is the fourth?

The brahmana: The wretch Arjuna.

Arjuna: Why, what fault has he committed?

The brahmana: Look at his felony, he made my beloved Lord take the mean office of a charioteer of his car in the great wars of Kurukshetra.

Arjuna was amazed at the depth of the poor brahmana's devotion and love, and from that moment his pride vanished, and he gave up thinking that he was the best devotee of the Lord.

Three Friends and The Tiger

Once, three friends were going through a forest, when a tiger suddenly appeared before them. "Brothers," one of them exclaimed, "we are lost!" "Why should you say that?" said the second friend, "Why should we be lost? Come, let

us pray to God." The third friend said: "No. Why should we trouble God about it? Come, let us climb this tree."

The friend who said 'We are lost!' did not know that there is a God who is our Protector. The friend who asked the others to pray to God was a jnani. He was aware that God is the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the world. The third friend, who didn't want to trouble God with prayers and suggested climbing the tree, had ecstatic love of God. It is the very nature of such love that it makes a man think himself stronger than his Beloved. He is always alert lest his Beloved should suffer. The one desire of his is to keep his Beloved from even being pricked in the foot by a thorn.

Single-Minded Devotion to One Ideal

Once the Pandava brothers performed the Rajasuya sacrifice. All the kings placed Yudhisthira on the royal throne and bowed low before him in homage. But, Vibhishana, the king of Ceylon, said, I bow down to Narayana and none else." At these words the Lord Krishna bowed down to Yudhisthira. Only then did Vibhishana prostrate himself, crown and all, before him.Such is unswerving and single-minded devotion to one ideal.

Ravana—The Great Devotee of Rama

Mandodari told her royal husband Ravana, "If you are so intent upon having Sita as your queen, why don't you impose on her by assuming the form of her husband Rama with the help of your magical powers?" ''Fie on you!" exclaimed Ravana "Can I stoop to the pleasures of the senses while I am in the holy form of Rama—a form the very thought of which fills my heart with such unspeakable joy and blessedness that even the highest heaven appears to me worthless?"

A Devotee Avoids What The World Runs After

After the death of Ravana, his brother Vibhishana refused to be the King of Ceylon. He said: "O Rama, I have obtained you. What shall I do with Kingship?"

Rama said: "Vibhishana, be King for the sake of the ignorant, for those who might ask what riches you have gained by serving me so much. Be King to give them a lesson".

"Why do you praise me? Say, 'Glory unto Krishna! Hail Krishna!' I am only His handmaid."

Back To The Divine Mother

A devotee, who is born with an element of Vishnu, cannot altogether get rid of bhakti.

Once I fell into the clutches of a Jnani, who made me listen to Vedanta for eleven months. But he could not altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Whenever I sang to Her, Nangta (Totapuri, the monk who initiated him into the practice of non-dual Vedanta, Him Sri Ramakrishna always refers to as "Nangta", or the "naked one.") would weep and "say, 'Ah! What is this?' You see, he was such a great Jnani and still he wept. Remember the popular saying that if a man drinks the juice of the alekh creeper, a plant grows inside his stomach. Once the seed of Bhakti is sown, the effect is inevitable: it will gradually grow into a tree with flowers and fruits.

You may reason and argue a thousand times, but if you have the seed of bhakti within you, you will surely come back to Hari.

Self-Surrender Knows no Complaint

When Rama and Lakshmana went to take their bath in Pampa Lake, they thrust their bows into the ground. Coming out of the water, Lakshmana took out his bow and found its tip stained with blood. Rama said to him:

"Look, brother! Look. Perhaps we have hurt some creature." Lakshmana dug in the earth and found a big bull frog. It was dying. Rama said to the frog in a sorrowful voice: "Why didn't you croak? We should have tried to save you. You croak lustily enough when you are in the jaws of a snake." The frog said:

"O Lord when I am attacked by a snake I croak, saying: 'O Rama, save me!' This time I found that it was Rama Himself who was killing me; so I kept still."

It's not Easy to Attain True Humility

A man went to a sadhu and said with a great show of humility: "Sir, I am a very low person. Tell me, O Master, how I am to be saved." The sadhu, reading the heart of the man, told him, "Well, go and bring me that which is meaner than yourself." The man went out and looked all round but found nothing whatsoever meaner than himself. At last he saw his own excrement and said, "Well, here is something which is certainly worse than myself." He stretched forth his hand to take it up and carry it to the sadhu when suddenly he heard a voice say from within the ordure: "Touch me not, O sinner. I was a sweet and delicious cake, fit to be offered to the gods and in appearance so pleasing to all the spectators. But my ill-fortune brought me to you, and by your evil contact I have been reduced to such a detestable condition that men run away from me with faces turned and

with handkerchiefs covering their noses. Once only did I come in contact with you and this has been my fate. What deeper degradation may I not be thrown into if you touch me again?”

The man was thus taught true humility and became the humblest of the humble. As a result he attained the highest perfection.

Renunciation and Dispassion

The Homa bird

The Vedas speak of the Homa bird. It lives very high in the sky. There the mother bird lays her egg. She lives so high that the egg falls for many days. While falling it is hatched. The chick continues to fall. That also goes on for many days. In the meantime the chick develops eyes. Coming near the earth, it becomes conscious of the world. It realises it will meet certain death if it hits the ground. Then it gives a shrill cry and shoots up towards its mother. The earth means death, and it frightens the young bird; it then seeks its mother. She dwells high up in the sky, and the young bird shoots straight up in that direction. It doesn’t look anywhere else.

Persons who are born with God-consciousness realise the danger of coming in contact with the world. From their very childhood they are afraid of the world, and their one thought is how to reach the mother, how to realise God.

Dispassion Comes Link a Flood and Never by Drops

How does a man come to have vairagya (dispassion)?

A wife once said to her husband: “Dear, I am very anxious about my brother. For the past one week he has been thinking of becoming an ascetic, and has been busy preparing for that life. He is trying to reduce gradually all his desires and wants.” The husband replied: “Dear, be not anxious about your brother. He will never become a sannyasin. No one can become a sannyasin in that way.” “How does one become a sannyasin then?” asked the wife. “Thus,” exclaimed the husband; so saying, he tore his flowing dress to pieces, took a piece and tied it round his loin, and told his wife that she and all of her sex were henceforth mothers to him. He left the house, nevermore to return.

None will Follow Thee After Death

A disciple said to his Guru that his wife loved him very much and so he could not renounce the world. The disciple used to practise Hatha Yoga. To convince him of the hollowness of his plea, the Guru taught him some secrets of this branch of Yoga. One day, all of a sudden, there was great consternation in the

disciple's house and wailings and sobbing were heard all around. The neighbours came running to the house, and saw the disciple in a room, quite motionless, in a peculiar convoluted posture. They all thought that life was, extinct in the body. The wife of the disciple was crying: "Alas! Where have you gone, dear? Why have you forsaken us? Ah! we never knew that such a calamity would befall us!" In the meantime the relatives brought a cot to take the corpse out for cremation. Then they found themselves face to face with a very serious difficulty. As the man was in a contorted posture, his body would not come out through the door. Seeing that, one of his neighbours, brought an axe and began to cut the wooden frame of the door.

Till then the wife was weeping in an uncontrollable fit of sorrow; but no sooner did she hear the sound of the axe than she ran to the spot, and, though still weeping, anxiously enquired what they were about. One of the neighbours told her that they were cutting the door as her husband's body could not otherwise be taken out owing to its peculiar posture. "No, no," cried out the wife, "don't do so now. I have been widowed and there is none to look after me. I have to bring up my fatherless children. If you now cut the door, it cannot be repaired again. Whatever was to happen has happened to my husband. You had better cut his hands and legs and take him out." Hearing this, the Hatha Yogi at once stood up; the effect of the drug having gone by this time, and bawled out, "Woman, you want to cut my hands and legs?" And so saying, he went away with his Guru renouncing hearth and home.

Simulation of Holiness May Become a Stimulation for it

One night a fisherman went into a garden and cast his net into the lake in order to steal some fish. The owner heard him and surrounded him with his servants. They brought lighted torches and began to search for him. In the mean time the fisherman smeared his body with ashes and sat under a tree, pretending to be a holy man. The owner and his men searched a great deal but could not find the thief. All they saw was a holy man covered with ashes, meditating under a tree. The next day the news spread in the neighbourhood that a great sage was staying in the garden. People gathered there and saluted him with offerings of fruits, flowers, and sweets. Many also offered silver and copper coins. "How strange!" thought the fisherman, 'I am not a genuine holy man, and still people show such devotion to me. I shall certainly realize God if I become a true sadhu. There is no doubt about it.'

As You Go From Near to Nearer

A mussalman, while saying his prayers, shouted: “O Allah! O Allah!” Another person said to him: “You are calling on Allah. That’s all right. But why are you shouting like that? Don’t you know that He hears the sound of the anklets on the feet of an ant?”

When the mind is united with God, one sees him very near, in one’s own heart. But you must remember one thing. The more you realize this unity, the farther your mind is withdrawn from worldly things. There is the story of Vilwamangal in the Bhaktamala. He used to visit a prostitute. One night he was very late in going to her house. He had been detained at home by the Sraddha ceremony of his father and mother. In his hands he was carrying the food offered in the ceremony, to feed his mistress. His whole soul was so set upon the woman that he was not at all conscious of his movements.

He did not even know how he was walking. There was a Yogi seated on the path, meditating on God with his eyes closed. Vilwamangal stepped on him.

The yogi became angry, and cried out: “What? Are you blind? I have been thinking of God and you step on my body!” “I beg your pardon” said Vilwamangal, “but may I ask you something? I have been unconscious, thinking of a prostitute, and you are conscious of the outer world though thinking of God. What kind of meditation is that?” In the end Vilwamangal renounced the world and went away in order to worship God. He said to the prostitute: ‘You are my Guru. You have taught me how one should yearn for God.” He addressed the prostitute as his mother and gave her up.

The King and The Pandit

There was a king who used daily to hear the Bhagavata recited by a pandit. Every day, after explaining the sacred book, the pandit would say to the king, “O King, have you understood what I have said?” And every day the king would reply, “You had better understand it first yourself.” The pandit would return home and think; “Why does the king talk to me that way day after day? I explain the texts to him so clearly, and he says to me, “you had better understand it first yourself”. What does he mean?” The pandit used to practise spiritual discipline. A few days later he came to realise that God alone is real and everything else—house, family, wealth, friends, name, and fame—illusory.

Convinced of the unreality of the world, he renounced it. As he left home he asked a man to take this message to the king: “O king, I now understand.”

A Salt Doll Went to Fathom The Ocean

Once, a salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean. It wanted to tell

others how deep the water was. But this it could never do, for no sooner did it get into the water than it melted. Now, who was there to report the ocean's depth?

What Brahman is cannot be described. In samadhi one attains the knowledge of Brahman—one realises Brahman. In that state reasoning stops altogether, and man becomes mute. He has no power to describe the nature of Brahman.

Where Silence is Eloquent and Speech Doth Falter

A man had two sons. The father sent them to a preceptor to learn the knowledge of Brahman. After a few years they returned from their preceptor's house and bowed low before their father. Wanting to measure the depth of their knowledge of Brahman, he first questioned the older of the two boys. "My child," he said "you have studied all the scriptures. Now, tell me, what is the nature of Brahman?" The boy began to explain Brahman by reciting various texts from the Vedas. The father did not say anything. Then he asked the younger son the same question. But the boy remained silent and stood with eyes cast down. No word escaped his lips. The father was pleased and said to him: "My child, you have understood a little of Brahman. What It is cannot be expressed in words."

The King and the Magician

As you go nearer to God you see less and less of His upadhis, His attributes. A devotee at first may see the Deity as the ten-armed Divine Mother; when he goes nearer, he sees her possessed of six arms; still nearer, he sees the Deity as the two—armed Gopala. The nearer he comes to the Deity, the fewer attributes he sees. At last, when he comes into the presence of (he Deity, he sees only Light without any attribute, Listen a little to the Vedantic reasoning. A magician came to a king to show his magic. When the magician moved away a little, the king saw a rider on horse-back approaching him. He was brilliantly arrayed and had various weapons in his hands. The king and the audience began to reason out what was real in the phenomenon before them. Evidently the horse was not real, nor the robes nor the armours. At last they found out beyond the shadow of a doubt that the rider alone was there. The significance of this is that Brahman alone is real and the world unreal. Nothing whatsoever remains if you analyse.

He Eats, Yet Eats Not

Once Vyasadeva was about to cross the Jamuna. The gopis also were there. They wanted to go to the other side of the river to sell curd, milk, and cream. But

there was no ferry at that time. They were all worried about how to cross the river, when Vyasa said to them, “I am very hungry.” The milkmaids fed him with milk and cream. He finished almost all their food. Then Vyasa said to the river, “O Jamuna, if I have not eaten anything, then your waters will part and we shall walk through.” It so happened. The river parted and a pathway was formed between the waters. Following that path, the gopis and Vyasa crossed the river.

Vyasa had said, “If I have not eaten anything.” That means, the real man is Pure Atman. Atman is unattached and beyond Prakriti. It has neither hunger nor thirst; It knows neither birth nor death; It does not age, nor does It die. It is immutable as Mount Sumeru.

All Pure Spirit

All doubts disappear when one sees God. It is one thing to hear of God, but quite a different thing to see Him. A man cannot have one hundred per cent conviction through mere hearing. But if he beholds God face to face, then he is wholly convinced.

Formal worship drops away after the vision of God. It was thus that my worship in the temple came to an end. I used to worship the deity in the Kali Temple. It was suddenly revealed to me that everything is Pure Spirit. The utensils of worship, the altar, the door-frame—all Pure Spirit. Then like a mad man I began to shower flowers in all directions. Whatever I saw I worshipped.

The Chameleon

Once a man entered a wood and saw a small animal on a tree. He came back and told another man that he had seen a creature of a beautiful red colour on a certain tree. The second man replied: “When f went into the wood, I also saw that animal. But why do you call it red? It is green.” Another man who was present contradicted them both and insisted that it was yellow. Presently others arrived and contended that it was grey, violet, blue, and so forth and so on. At last they started quarrelling among themselves. To settle the dispute they all went to the tree. They saw a man sitting under it. On being asked, he replied: *’Yes, I live under this tree and I know the animal very well. All your descriptions are true. Sometimes it appears red, sometimes yellow, and at other times blue, violet, grey and so forth. It is a chameleon. And sometimes it has no colour at all. Now it has a colour, and now it has none.”

In like manner, one who constantly thinks of God can know His real nature; he alone knows that God reveals Himself to seekers in various forms and aspects. God has attributes; then again He has none. Only the man who lives under the tree knows that the chameleon can appear in various colours, and he

knows further that the animal at times has no colour at all. It is the others who suffer from the agony of futile argument.

What The Divine Mother Revealed to Me

Do you know where those who speak of the formless God make their mistake? It is where they say that God is formless only, and that those who differ from them .are wrong.

But I know God is both with and without form. And he may have many more aspects. It is possible for Him to be everything.

The Chitsakti, Mahamaya, has become the twenty four cosmic principles. One day as I was meditating, my mind wandered away to Rasik's house. He is a scavenger. I said to my mind, 'Stay there, you rogue!'

The Divine Mother revealed to me that the men and women in this house were mere masks; inside them was the same Divine Power, Kundalini that rises up through the six spiritual centres of the body.

Strip Name and Form and Look Beyond

Once a sadhu placed his disciple in a magnificent garden with the intention of imparting to him the knowledge of the real Self and went away. After a few days he came back and asked the disciple, "Do you feel any want, my boy?" On being answered in the affirmative, he left with him a fair woman named Shyama, and advised him to take fish and meat freely. After a considerable time he came again and asked the same question as before. This time the disciple replied, "No, I have no want, thank you". The sadhu then called both the disciple and Shyama to him and pointing to Shyama's hands, asked the disciple, "Can you tell me what these are?" "Why, these are Shyama's hands", replied the disciple. He put the same question several times, pointing to Shyama's eyes, nose, and other parts of the body, and the disciple gave appropriate answers. Presently the idea struck the disciple, "I am talking of everything as Shyama's 'this' and Shyama's 'that'. What then is this Shyama?" Bewildered, he asked his Guru the question, "But who is this Shyama to whom belong these eyes, ears and the rest?" The sadhu said, ''If you wish to know who this Shyama is, come with me, and I will enlighten you". So saying, he revealed to him the secret.

Nothing is Impossible for Him

One day in course of a conversation about God, Mathur Babu observed, "God too must abide by his own laws, He has no power to transcend them." "What an absurd proposition!", I exclaimed, "One who has made a law can repeal it at

pleasure or make a new law in its place."

'"How can that be?" said Mathur. "A plant that produces only red flowers cannot produce flowers of any other colour,—white, for instance, for such is the law.

I should like to see God produce white flowers from a plant bearing only red flowers," "That too He can do," answered I, "for everything depends on His will." Mathur was not convinced. The next day, while taking a stroll in the temple garden I came across a china-rose plant with two flowers on the same stalk, one of which was red and the other snow-white. I broke off the branch to show it to Mathur, who felt highly surprised at the sight of it and exclaimed, "Father, I will never more argue a point with thee."

God is Under the Control of His Devotees

Some Sikhs said to me in front of the Kali temple, "God is compassionate". I said, "To whom is he compassionate?" "Why revered sir, to all of us", said the Sikhs. I said: "We are His children. Does compassion to one's own children mean much? A father must look after his children; or do you expect the people of the neighbourhood to bring them up? Well, won't those who say that God is compassionate ever understand that we are God's children and not someone else's?"

Should we not, then, address God as compassionate? Of course we should, as long as we practise sadhana. After realizing God, one rightly feels that God is our Father or Mother. As long as we have not realized God, we feel that we are far away from Him, children of someone else.

During the stage of sadhana one should describe God by all His attributes. One day Hazra said to Narendra: "God is Infinity. Infinite is His splendour. Do you think He will accept your offerings of sweets and bananas or listen to your music? This is a mistaken notion of yours." Narendra at once sank ten fathom. So I said to Hazra, "You villain! Where will these youngsters be if you talk to them like that?" How can a man live if he gives up devotion? No doubt God has infinite splendour; yet He is under the control of His devotees. A rich man's gate keeper comes to the parlour where his master is seated with his friends. He stands on one side of the room. In his hand he has something covered with a cloth. He is very hesitant, The master asks him, "Well, gatekeeper, what have you in your hand?" Very hesitantly the servant takes out a custard-apple from under the cover, places it in front of his master, and says, "Sir, it is my desire that you eat this," The master is impressed by his servant's devotion. With great love he takes the fruit in his hand and says: "Ah! This is a very nice custard-apple.

Where did you pick it? You must have taken a great deal of trouble to get it."

God is under the control of His devotees. King Duryodhana was very attentive to Krishna and said to Him, "Please have your meal here." But the Lord went to Vidura's hut. He was very fond of His devotee. He ate Vidura's simple rice and greens as if they were celestial food.

Inscrutable Are The Ways of God

How can we understand the ways of God through our small intellects?

As Bhishma lay dying on his bed of arrows, the Pandava brothers and Krishna stood around him. They saw tears flowing from the eyes of the great hero. Arjuna said to Krishna: "Friend, how surprising it is! Even such a man as our grandsire Bhishma—truthful, self-restrained, supremely wise and one of the eight Vasus—weeps through Maya, at the hour of death." Sri Krishna asked Bhishma about it. Bhishma replied: "O Krishna, You know very well that this is not the cause of my grief. I am thinking that there is no end to the Pandavas' sufferings, though God Himself is their charioteer. A thought like this makes me feel that I have understood nothing of the ways of God, and so I weep."

Why Not Through a Man?

It is God Himself who plays about as human beings. If God can be worshipped through a clay image why not through a man?

Once a merchant was shipwrecked. He floated to the shore of Ceylon, where Vibhishana was the king of the monsters. Vibhishana ordered his servants to bring the merchant to him. At the sight of him Vibhishana was overwhelmed with joy and said: "Ah! He looks like my Rama. The same human form!" He adorned the merchant with robes and jewels, and worshipped him. When I first heard this story, I felt such joy that I cannot describe it.

Both Friend and Foe: The Saint's Adore

THERE was a monastery in a certain place. The monks residing there went out daily to beg their food. One day a monk, while out for his alms, saw a landlord beating a man mercilessly. The compassionate monk stepped in and asked the landlord to stop. But the landlord was filled with anger and turned his wrath against the innocent monk. He beat the monk till he fell unconscious on the ground. Someone reported the matter to the monastery. The monks ran to the spot and found their brother lying there. Four or five of them carried him back and laid him on a bed. He was still unconscious. The other monks sat around him sad at heart; some were fanning him. Finally someone suggested that he should be given a little milk to drink. "When it was poured into his mouth he

regained consciousness. He opened his eyes and looked around. One of the monks said, “Let us see whether he is fully conscious and can recognise us.” Shouting into his ear, he said, “Revered sir, who is giving you milk?” “Brother, replied the holy man in a low voice, “he who beat me is now giving me milk.”

The Physician with his Jars of Molasses

A physician prescribed medicine for a patient and said to him, “Come another day and I’ll give you directions about diet,” The physician had several jars of molasses in his room that day. The patient lived very far away. He visited the physician later and the physician said to him, “Be careful about your food. It is not good for you to eat molasses.” After the patient left, another person who was there said to the physician, “Why did you give him all the trouble of coming here again? You could very well have given him the instructions the first day.” The physician replied with a smile: “There is a reason. I had several jars of molasses in my room that day. If I had asked the patient then to give up molasses, he would not have had faith in my words. He would have thought; ‘He has so many jars of molasses in his room, he must eat some of it. Then molasses can’t be so bad.’ Today I have hidden the jars. Now he will have faith in my words.”

Renunciation of the world is needful for those whom God wants to be teachers of men. One who is an acharya should give up ‘woman and gold’; otherwise people will not take his advice. It is not enough for him to renounce only mentally; he should also renounce outwardly. Only then will his teaching bear fruit. Otherwise people will think, “Though he asks us to give up ‘woman and gold’, he enjoys them himself in secret.”

The Grass-Eating Tiger

Once, a tigress attacked a flock of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The cub grew up in the company of the goats. The goats ate grass and the cub followed their example. They bleated: the cub bleated too. Gradually it grew to be a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the same flock. It was amazed to see the grass-eating tiger. Running after it, the wild tiger at last seized it, whereupon the grass-eating tiger began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to the water and said: “Look at your face in the water. It is just like mine. Here is a little meat. Eat it.” Saying this, it thrust some meat into its mouth. But the grass-eating tiger would not swallow it and began to bleat again. Gradually, however, it got the taste for blood and came to relish the meat. Then the wild tiger said: “Now you see, there is no difference between you and me. Come along and follow me into the forest.”

So there can be no fear if the guru's grace descends on one. He will let you know who you are and what your real nature is.

How Sri Chaitanya Attracted The Worldly

Wordly people will never listen to you if you ask them to renounce everything and devote themselves whole-heartedly to God. Therefore Chaitanya and Nitai, after some deliberation, made an arrangement to attract the worldly. They would say to such persons, "Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have a delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman." Many people, attracted by the fish and woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God's hallowed name, they would soon realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth. The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of divine love.

Count not Leaves, Eat Mangoes

Two friends went into an orchard. One of them possessing much worldly wisdom, immediately began to count the mango trees there and the number of leaves and mangoes each tree bore, to estimate what might be the approximate value of the whole orchard. His companion however went to the owner, made friendship with him, and then, quietly going to a tree, began, at his host's desire, to pluck the fruits and eat them. Whom do you consider to be the wiser of the two? Eat mangoes! It will satisfy your hunger. What is the good of counting the trees and leaves and making calculations?

The vain man of intellect busies himself uselessly with finding out the 'why' and 'wherefore' of creation, while the humble man of wisdom makes friends with the Creator and enjoys His gift of supreme bliss.

Be Drowned!

Once I said to Narendra, "Look here, my boy. God is the ocean of Bliss. Don't you want to plunge into this ocean? Suppose there is a cup of syrup and you are a fly. Where will you sit to sip the syrup?" Narendra said, "I will sit on the edge of the cup and stick my head out to drink it." "Why," said I, "why should you sit on the edge" He replied, "If I go far into the syrup, I shall be drowned and lose my life." Then I said to him: "But my child, there is no such fear in the Ocean of Satchidananda. It is the Ocean of Immortality.

By plunging into It a man does not die; he becomes immortal. Man does not lose his consciousness by being mad about God."

Go Beyond Knowledge and Ignorance

Go beyond knowledge and ignorance; only then can you realize God.

To know many things is ignorance. Pride of scholarship is also ignorance. The unwavering conviction that God alone dwells in all beings is Jnana, knowledge. To know him intimately is Vijnana, a richer knowledge. If a thorn gets into your foot, a second thorn is needed to take it out. When it is out both thorns are thrown away. You have to procure the thorn of knowledge to remove the thorn of ignorance; then you must set aside both knowledge and ignorance. God is beyond both knowledge and ignorance.

Once Lakshmana said to Rama, “Brother, how amazing it is that such a wise man as Vasishtha wept bitterly at the death of his son!” Rama said, “Brother, he who has knowledge must also have ignorance. He who has knowledge of one thing must also have knowledge of many things. He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness.”

Brahman is beyond knowledge and ignorance, virtue and vice, merit and demerit, cleanliness and uncleanliness.

Give The Dog a Good Beating at Times

There was a man who had a pet dog. He used to caress it, carry it about in his arms, play with it and kiss it. A wise man, seeing this foolish behaviour of his, warned him not to lavish such affection on a dog. For it was, after all, an irrational brute, and might bite him one day. The owner took the warning to heart and putting the dog away from his arms, resolved never again to fondle it or to caress it. But the animal could not first understand the change in his master, and would run to him frequently to be taken up and caressed. Beaten several times, the dog at last ceased to trouble his master any more.

Such indeed is everybody’s condition. The dog you have been cherishing (i.e., lust) so long in your bosom will not easily leave you, though you may wish to be rid of it. However, there is no harm in it. Do not caress the dog any more, but give it a good beating whenever it approaches you to be fondled, and in course of time you will be altogether free from its importunities.

Count not on The Unknown Future

Once in the month of June a kid was playing near its mother. With a merry frisk it told her that it intended to make a good feast of Ras-flowers (a species of flowers budding abundantly during the festival of Rasalila in November.) “Well my darling,” replied the dam, “It is not such an easy thing as you seem to think.

You will have to pass through many a danger before you can hope to feast on Ras-flowers. The ensuing months of September and October are not very auspicious to you! For someone may take you to be sacrificed to the Goddess Durga. Then there is the terrible time of Kali-puja and if you are fortunate enough to survive that period also, there is still the Jagaddhatri-puja when almost all that remain of the male members of our species are sacrificed. If your good luck carries you safely through all these crises, then you can hope to make a feast of Ras- flowers in the beginning of November."

Like the dam in the fable, we should not hastily approve of all the aspirations which our youthful fancies may entertain, considering the manifold crises which we may have to pass through in our lives.

Hiss You May, But Bite You Shall Not

Some cowherd boys used to tend their cows in a meadow where a terrible poisonous snake lived. Everyone was on the alert for fear of it. One day a brahmachari was going along the meadow. The boys ran to him and said: "Revered sir, please don't go that way. A venomous snake lives over there." "What of it, my good children?" said the brahmachari. "I am not afraid of the snake. I know some mantras." So saying, he continued on his way along the meadow. But the cowherd boys, being afraid, did not accompany him. In the meantime the snake moved swiftly towards him with upraised hood. As soon as it came near, he recited a mantra, and the snake lay at his feet like an earth worm. The brahmachari said: "Look here. Why do you go about doing harm? Come, I will give you a holy word. By repeating it you will learn to love God. Ultimately you will realize Him and also get rid of your violent nature." Saying this, he taught the snake a holy word and initiated it into spiritual life. The snake bowed before the teacher and said, "Revered sir, how I shall practise spiritual discipline?" "Repeat that sacred word", said the teacher, "and do no harm to anybody." As he was about to depart, the brahmachari said, "I shall see you again."

Some days passed and the cowherd boys noticed that the snake would not bite. They threw stones at it.

Still it showed no anger; it behaved as if it were an earthworm. One day one of the boys came close to it, caught it by the tail, and whirling it round and round, dashed it again and again on the ground and threw it away. The snake vomited blood and became unconscious. It was stunned. It could not move. So, thinking it dead, the boys went their way.

Late at night the snake regained consciousness. Slowly and with great

difficulty it dragged itself into its hole; its bones were broken and it could scarcely move. Many days passed. The snake became a mere skeleton covered with skin. Now and then, at night, it would come out in search of food. For fear of the boys it would not leave its hole during the day time. Since receiving the sacred word from the teacher, it had given up doing harm to others. It maintained its life on dirt, leaves, or the fruit that dropped from trees.

About a year later the brahmachari came that way again and asked after the snake. The cowherd boys told him that it was dead. But he couldn't believe them. He knew that the snake would not die before attaining the fruit of the holy word with which it had been initiated. He found his way to the place and searching here and there, called it by the name he had given it. Hearing the Guru's voice, it came out of its hole and bowed before him with great reverence. "How are you?" asked the brahmachari. "I am well, sir", replied the snake. "But", the teacher asked, "why are you so thin?" The snake replied, 'Revered sir, you ordered me not to harm anybody. So I have been living only on leaves and fruit. Perhaps that has made me thinner."

The snake had developed the quality of sattva; it could not be angry with anyone. It had totally forgotten that the cowherd boys had almost killed it.

The brahmachari said: "It can't be mere want of food that has reduced you to this state. There must be some other reason. Think a little." Then the snake remembered that the boys had dashed it against the ground. It said: "Yes, revered sir, now I remember. The boys one day dashed me violently against the ground. They are ignorant, after all. They didn't realise what a great change had come over my mind. How could they know I wouldn't bite or harm anyone?" The brahmachari exclaimed: "What a shame! You are such a fool! You don't know how to protect yourself. I asked you not to bite, but I didn't forbid you to hiss. Why didn't you scare them away by hissing?"

So you must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm. But never inject your venom into them. One must not injure others

First Cleanse Thee Pure, Then Preach and Cure

There lived in a village a young man named Padmalochan. People used to call him, 'Podo' for short. In this village there was a temple in a very dilapidated condition. It contained no image of God. Aswattha and other plants sprang up on the ruins of its walls. Bats lived inside, and the floor was covered with dust and the droppings of the bats. The people of the village had stopped visiting the temple. One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch-shell from the direction of the temple. They thought perhaps someone had installed an image in the shrine and was performing the evening worship. One of them softly

opened the door and saw Padmalochan standing in a corner, blowing the conch. No image had been set up. The temple hadn't been swept or washed. And filth and dirt lay everywhere. Then he shouted to Podo:

"You have set no image here within the Shrine, O fool! Blowing the conch, you simply make confusion worse confounded. Day and night eleven bats scream there incessantly."

There is no use in making a noise if you want to establish the Deity in the shrine of your heart, if you want to realize God. First of all purify the mind. In the pure heart God takes His seat. One cannot bring the holy image into the temple if the droppings of bats are all-around. The eleven bats are our eleven organs: five of action, five of perception, and the mind.

First of all invoke the Deity, and then give lectures to your heart's content. First of all dive deep, plunge to the bottom and gather up the gems. Then you may do other things.

What to Pray For?

While praying to God, ask only for love for His Lotus Feet.

When Rama redeemed Ahalya from the curse, He said to her, "Ask a boon of Me". Ahalya said, "O Rama, if you deign to grant me a boon, then please fulfil my desire that I may always meditate on your Lotus Feet, even though I may be born in a pig's body."

I prayed to the Divine Mother only for love. I offered flowers at Her Lotus Feet and said with folded hands: "O Mother, here is Thy ignorance and here is Thy knowledge; take them both and give me pure love for Thee.

The beautiful and devoted wife of a great sage Gautama, named Ahalaya. Indra, the king of heaven, infatuated with her beauty seduced her, impersonating her husband. The sage, coming to know of this, cursed her and turned her into a stone, but he said that the touch of Rama's feet would restore her human form. Indra, too, received his share of the curse, as a result of which he had a thousand eruptions on his body. Hence he is known as the thousand-eyed God.

Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness; take them both and give me pure love for Thee. Here is Thy virtue and here is Thy sin; here is Thy good and here is Thy evil; take them both and give me pure love for Thee. Here is Thy dharma and here is Thy adharma; take them both and give me love for Thee.

One Who Sees 'Elephant God' Should Heed The Words of 'Mahut God'

In a forest there lived a holy man who had many disciples. One day he taught them to see God in all beings and knowing this, to bow low before them all. A

disciple went to the forest to gather wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly he heard an outcry, “Get out of the way! A mad elephant is coming!” All but the disciple of the holy man took to their heels. He reasoned that the elephant was also God in another form. Then why should he run away from it? He stood still, bowed before the animal, and began to sing its praises. The mahut of the elephant was shouting: “Run away! Run away!” But the disciple didn’t move. The .animal seized him with its trunk, cast him to one side, and went on its way. Hurt and bruised, the disciple lay unconscious on the ground. Hearing what had happened, his teacher and his brother disciples came to him and carried him, to the hermitage. With the help of some medicine he soon regained consciousness. Someone asked him, “You knew the elephant was coming—why didn’t you leave the place?” “But,” he said, “Our teacher has told us that God Himself has taken all these forms, of animals as well as men. Therefore, thinking it was only the elephant God that was coming, I didn’t run away.” At this the teacher said: “Yes, my child, it is true that the elephant God was coming; but the mahut God forbade you to stay there. Since all are manifestations of God, why didn’t you trust the mahut’s words? You should have heeded the words of the mahut God.”

God dwells in all beings. But you may be intimate only with good people; you must keep away from the evil-minded. God is even in the tiger; but you cannot embrace the tiger on that account! You may say, “Why run away from a tiger, which is also a manifestation of God?” The answer to that is: Those who tell you to run away arc also manifestations of God—and why shouldn’t you listen to them?

God undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all—holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words,but with others one shouldn’t go even that far. One should keep aloof from such people.

Brood Over Other’s Sing, And You Sin Yourself

A Sannyasin dwelt by the side of a temple. There was the house of a harlot in front. Seeing the constant concourse of men in the prostitute’s house, the sannyasin one day called her and censured her, saying: “You are a great sinner. You sin day and night. Oh, how miserable will be your lot hereafter.” The poor prostitute became extremely sorry for her misdeeds, and with genuine inward repentance she prayed to God beseeching forgiveness. But as prostitution was her profession, she could not easily adopt any other means of earning her livelihood. And so, whenever her flesh sinned, she always reproached herself

with greater contrition of heart and prayed to God more and, more for forgiveness. The sannyasin saw that his advice had apparently produced no effect upon her, and thought, “Let me see how many persons will visit this woman in the course of her life.” And from that day forward, whenever any person entered the house of the prostitute, the sannyasin counted him by putting a pebble aside, and in course of time there arose a big heap of pebbles. One day the sannyasin said to the prostitute, pointing to the heap: “Woman, don’t you see this heap? Each pebble in it stands for every commission of the deadly sin you have been indulging in since. I advised you last to desist from the evil course. Even now I tell you: Beware of your evil deeds!” The poor wretch began to tremble at the sight of the accumulation of her sins, and she prayed to God shedding tears of utter helplessness, inwardly repeating, “Lord, wilt Thou not free me from the miserable life that I am leading?” The prayer was heard, and on that very day the angel of death passed by her house, and she ceased to exist in this world. By the strange will of God, the sannyasin also died on the same day. The messengers of Vishnu came down from Heaven and carried the spirit-body of the contrite prostitute to the heavenly regions, while the messengers of Yama bound the spirit of the sannyasin and carried him down to the nether world. The sannyasin, seeing the good luck of the prostitute, cried aloud: “Is this the subtle justice of God? I passed all my life in asceticism and poverty, and I am carried to hell, while that prostitute, whose life was a whole record of sin, is going to Heaven!” Hearing this, the messengers of Vishnu said: “The decrees of God are always just; as you think, so you reap. You passed your life in external show and vanity, trying to get honour and fame; and God has given you this. Your heart never sincerely yearned after Him. This prostitute earnestly prayed to God day and night, though her body sinned all the while. Look at the treatment which your body and her body are receiving from those below. As you never sinned with your body, they have decorated it with flowers and garlands, and are carrying it with music in a procession to consign it to the sacred river. But this prostitute’s body, which had sinned is being torn to pieces at this moment by vultures and jackals. Nevertheless, she was pure in heart and is therefore going to the regions of the pure. Your heart was always absorbed in contemplating her sins and thus became impure. You are therefore going to the regions of the impure. You were the real prostitute, and not she.”

What you Are After, Is Within Yourself

A man wanted a smoke. He went to a neighbour’s house to light his charcoal. It was the dead of night and the household was asleep. After he had knocked a

great deal, someone came down to open the door. At sight of the man he asked, “Hello! What’s the matter?” The man replied, “Can’t you guess? You know how fond I am of smoking. I have come here to light my charcoal.” The neighbour said, “Ha! Ha! You are a fine man indeed! You took the trouble to come and do all this knocking at the door! Why, you have a lighted lantern in your hand!”

What a man seeks is very near him. Still he wanders about from place to place.

How One Can Enter The Mansion of God

It is on account of the ego that one is not able to see God. In front of the door of God’s mansion lies the stamp of Ego. One cannot enter the mansion without jumping over the stamp.

There was once a man who had acquired the power to tame ghosts. One day, at his summons, a ghost appeared. The ghost said, “Now tell me what you want me to do. The moment you cannot give me any work I shall break your neck.” The man had many things to accomplish and he had the ghost to do them all, one by one. At last he could find nothing more for the ghost to do. “Now”, said the ghost, “I am going to break your neck.” “Wait a minute”, said the man. “I shall return presently.” He ran to his teacher and said, “Revered sir, I am in great danger. This is my trouble.” And he told his teacher his trouble and asked, “What shall I do now?” The teacher said, “Do this. Tell the ghost to straighten this kinky hair.” The ghost devoted itself day and night to straightening the hair. But how could it make a kinky hair straight? The hair remained kinky.

Likewise, the ego seems to vanish this moment, but it reappears the next. Unless one renounces the ego, one does not receive the grace of God.

Partial Knowledge Breeds Narrowness

Four blind men went out to see an elephant. One touched the leg of the elephant and said, “The elephant is like a pillar.” The second touched the trunk and said, “The elephant is like a thick club.” The third touched the belly and said, “The elephant is like a big jar.” The fourth touched the ears and said, “The elephant is like a big winnowing basket.” Thus they began to dispute hotly amongst themselves as to the shape of the elephant. A passer-by, seeing them thus quarrelling, said, “What is it you are disputing about?” They told him everything and asked him to arbitrate. The man said: “None of you has seen the elephant. The elephant is not like a pillar, its legs are like pillars. It is not like a winnowing basket, its ears are like winnowing baskets. It is not like a stout club, its trunk is like a club. The elephant is the combination of all these—legs, ears,

belly, trunk and so on."

In the same manner, those who quarrel (about the nature of God) have each seen only some one aspect of the Deity.

No Scripturist Ever Flaunts of His Learning

A learned brahmana once went to a wise king and said, "I am well-versed, O king, in the holy scriptures. I intend to teach you the Bhagavata. The king, who was the wiser of the two, knew well that a man who had really studied the Bhagavata would seek to know his own Self rather than go to a king's court for wealth and honour. So the king replied: "I see, O brahmana, that you yourself have not mastered that book thoroughly. I promise to make you my tutor, but first learn the scripture well." The brahmana went on his way thinking "How foolish it is of the king to say that I have not mastered the Bhagavata, seeing that I have been reading the book over and over all these years." However, he went through the book carefully once more and appeared again before the king. The king told him the same thing again and sent him away. The brahmana was sorely vexed, but thought that there must be some meaning in the behaviour of the king. He went home, shut himself up in his room, and applied himself more than ever to the study of the book. By and by, hidden meanings began to flash into his mind and the vanity of running after the bubbles of riches and honour, kings and courts, wealth and fame appeared to his unclouded vision. From that day forward he gave himself up entirely to attaining perfection by the worship of God, and never thought of returning to the king. A few years after, the king thought of the brahmana and went to his house to see what he was doing. Seeing him, now radiant with Divine light and love, he fell upon his knees and said: "I see that you have now realised the true meaning of the scriptures. I am ready to be your disciple if you will kindly condescend to make me one."

Nababidhan Brahma Samaj of Keshab Chandra Sen

House of Balaram Bose, Where the Ramakrishna Mission Was founded on 1 May, 1897

Simhavahini at Jadu Mullick’s House

Parlour in Govida Dutta’s temple-garden at Kamarhati

Kalighat Temple

Chaitanya sabha at Colootolla

Sadharan Brahma Samaj

Vrindaban-one of Sri Ramakrishna’s most favourite Pilgrimages

Varanasi-Sri Ramakrishna Went into Bhavsamadhi many a time in this holy city

Imperial Museum, Calcutta-Mid 19thcentury

Old view of zoo at Calcutta which was visited by Sri Ramakrishna

IN THE EYES OF MONKS OF THE ORDER

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS MISSION TO THE WORLD: WHAT CAN IT TEACH US

Swami Virajananda

The subject of this essay is one who is not removed from us by long centuries with their unavoidably wild growth of mythology, story and tradition, one contradicting another, such as cluster round great personalities : but one who is within the loving memory of many young men of today—one who left this mayavic mask of the body only sixteen years ago, one who lived in the fag end of the nineteen century, yet took us back through the rolling vistas of time to the sacred atmosphere of the Rishi age when the first enlightened Seers sounded the trumpet of freedom :

'I have known that Great One—radiant like the Sun, beyond darkness.' (Svet. Up, III. 8)

Sri Ramakrishna was a strange personality, having so many varied aspects of character that it might truly be said that he lived in one body the lives of many of the perfected ones that humanity has ever produced. He was the cord that threaded into a single garland all the highest spiritual ideals of the past and the present alike! He was himself the living embodiment of the words that fell from his lips, untouched by the taint of the presentday materialistic civilization, though living in it.

His was the spontaneous growth of a soul towards the highest and the blossoming forth of a spirit-flower, which drew the bees from all around. Ramakrishna was nothing if not orginal. His life affords a unique study for those who aspire to truth, to victory over the senses, to the realization of God. And he who casts his life in Ramakrishna's mould will surely attain, like him, the success, the peace, the goal, which is blessedness. He was wonderful, even as a boy. Son of a Brahman who was intensely religious in the orthodox way, rigid in the observance of sacred rites, Ramakrishna's dauntless independence of character showed itself early, on the occasion of his investiture with the sacred thread, by his taking *Bhiksha* from the hands of a low-caste woman to whom he had promised this, notwithstanding all the remonstrances and threats of his

father. Discrimination formed one of the strongest traits of his character. As a boy of seven years, sent to a village school for education, he brooded over the ultimate end of intellectual knowledge and could see nothing in it but a means of earning livelihood. Even so the vulture soars for above the sky but its whole attention is bent on finding some rotten carcass on the ground. *Once the conclusion is reached the matter is solved for good.* His school life ended but not to give place to idleness. He determined to gain the knowledge which destroys ignorance, the light which dispels darkness, that knowldge, by knowing which all else can be known, for as the Upanishad says, by knowing the clay all that is made of it is cognised. This spirit of discrimination, coupled with the resolute will not to turn back as long as the goal is not reached, formed the secret of his success all through life. He distinctly perceived by his acute analytical mind that the chief bar to God-vision was the heart's hidden clinging to the world. He now set his whole heart upon the conquest of this deadliest foe of man. He reduced the countless forms in which world-attachment shows itself into two, *viz.,* lust and gold, and vanquished them, one after another by the mighty sword of discrimination. He sat down to discriminate, taking in one hand a lump of clay and in the other a silver coin. Addressing the mind he said, 'This is silver and this is clay ; by the one you can build huge temples and palaces and feed hundreds of men and animals, ride in carriages drawn by horses and supply all the wants of the body; by the other also you can make bricks and tiles and the beautiful shapes of statues and so on, but what is either of these for except the enjoyment of the senses ? Both being matter, they never take one beyond it. Being themselves finite they never lead one to the infinite. Why do you vainly hanker after such ? Let them both be the same to you. Having meditated upon this over and over again his mind was strongly impressed with the idea that both were the same ; and he ended by throwing both into the Ganga. But it should be remembered, that this was no mere intellectual achievement ; it was renunciation, true to the word and the spirit.

For, henceforward he could not even touch any metal without having his fingers stiffened and paralysed. It may sound like black magic to the wordlyminded—something of charlatanry, something imposed upon our credulity ; but it stood the test of a hundred trials. Some one put a coin under the mattress of his bed when he was away; coming back he could not even touch the bed, which to him seemed a couch of thorns as long as the coin was not taken out. Some one put an *amla* fruit in his pocket without his knowledge and he could not with the stolen article walk through the right road to the gate, his feet taking him, why he did not know, amidst thorns and by dirty ways.

Of all the human emotions of mutual relationship none is so pure and high,

none so unselfish and ennobling, none so innocent and sweet, as the relation of a child to its mother. So there is but one way of escape from carnal passion and that is to know woman as mother—as the manifestation of Divine Motherhood, that Shakti or force which is both Vidya and Avidya—playing as the chaste and modest wife, but none the less also as the prostitute, though in a very different garb. This once realized, it become to him a fact, and he could not see even his own wife (for he was married in his boyhood) in any other light.

The great impostor that clings to man so fondly, and is nearest and dearest to his heart, that treacherous friend— Egoism —which is the hardest of all to get rid of—springing up again and again like the banyan tree, however often it may be cut down, was the one he saw still left, eating and fattening itself, unawares, upon the dearly earned fruits of his devotion. 'What is this idea of "me" and "mine"?' he asked himself, 'who is always boasting—I am the son of so-and-so, I do this, I do that, I am so very good and religious, who is there to compare to me, do they not know me, it is my house, my land, my wealth ?—this pest of "me" and "mine" always harassing us, turning the mind inside out, and disturbing its equanimity and peace, causing untold trouble ? It must be eradicated,'

He struggled and struggled but the idea would not go, indeed it seemed to stay, as if only to provoke him. He saw that this idea had its existence in ignorance onfy, and that it was only with the advent of Knowledge that the 'me and mine' change places with 'Thee and Thine.' Or it leaves its narrow cell and spreads itself into the universal I, the universal Self—there is then nothing but I, I am all in all. This is the I of knowledge—'the ripe I,' as he used to say, in comparison with the unripe I—the I of ignorance. His mastery over the narrow self was so complete that he could not utter the first person singular or first person possessive singular when speaking of himself. He would always say 'This body'instead of 'My body', 'Mother wishes instead of 'I would', 'Do come here' instead of 'Do come to me'. He always dealt a death blow at the I-idea whenever it reared its head. Once a rich disciple of his presented him with a valuable shawl, and put it himself around him. A few minutes after, what was his surprise to see Ramakrishna throw it away in the mire. Addressing himself at the same time he was saying, 'Now you are rightly served, you are, you fool of an egoism?'

But the most prominent feature of his life, the one thing that we lack so much nowadays, but which was our distinctive national character in the old times—was his intense practicality in religion. Theorising would not do. The world had had enough of it. One might talk exceedingly well, deliver beautiful and stirring sermons and lectures, but of what avail would it all be if one failed miserably to

live the life one preached ? Who would listen to one and attach importance to one's words if one could not show in his life a living example of what one said ? Any amount of thinking and theorising is sure to fail in the long run ; is sure to be superseded by another higher intellect ; is sure to leave the man as weak as ever—a miserable wreck—before any great temptation and trial, if accompained by no life of realization. Religion—the power of the spirit that would tide over all those ills and ailments of the internal world that the human soul is victim to—must be realized, must be sensed, as it were, or no peace, no cessation of misery, no escape from eternal slavery to nature, is possible. So intense was Ramakrishna's devotion that he would forget food and drink often, would not know what sleep was for months. So intense was his anxiety to see his Divine Mother face to face, talk with Her, be a child in Her arms, that he would become frantic at seeing the sun set on the horizon, day after day, in each of which he expected to be blessed with the Divine vision. With this intense fire burning in his heart, fanned by daily disappointments, he would roll on the ground, rubbing his face, shedding tears that would make the earth wet, with cries of 'Mother, Mother, where are You, show Yourself to me, Your helpless child, but once.' His heart-rending cries and lamentations would draw crowds of sympathetic men and women from the neighbourhood, who, thinking that his beloved mother had just died, would try in vain to soothe him. 'A hurricane," as he used to say referring to those days, 'passed over me sweeping away every thing before it.' At last he was blest with the sight of his Mother, at which moments he would lose all outward consciousness in the overpowering ecstasy of Divine communion, when he would speak in broken words, whose meaning no one understood, laugh and dance, and cry, anil shake, and be still and silent. His sacred thread he would lose every time it was put on, his dhoti he would put under his arm or it would fall off unconsciously!

Totapuri, a great Vedantist Sannyasin, in course of his wanderings came to the temple garden at Dakshineswar near Calcutta, where Sri Ramakrishna lived and spent the greatest part of his life—and instructed him in the knowledge and practices necessary to the realization of the Absolute Brahman, one without a second. What was his surprise to see his disciple reach the highest stage of Yoga —the *Samadhi* in the unconditioned Brahman—in three days only—a stage which had taken Totapuri himself 41 years of hard work in the Himalayas to arrive at ! He went through many other *Sadhanas* or religious practices, consisting of the idea of the five relationships with God connected with the various sects of Hinduism. Next came a Sannyasin lady of wonderful part, versed in the scriptures, who initiated him into Tantric practices. It was she who was the first to dispel from the mind of men the false notion of Ramakrishna's

madness and disease by quoting from the Shastras the characteristic marks of God-men, such as Chaitanya, Sri Krishna, and others, and showing point by point their agreement with Ramakrishna's case.

Having thus realized the ideals of the different sects of Hinduism, he next turned his attention to the other religions of the world. He practised the religion of the Prophet, being initiated by one who was secretly following it. Be it noted here that for the three days he practised it, he adhered strictly to Mohammedan customs and usages, subsisting on such unorthodox diet as onions. During that time he would look at no temple or Hindu god or goddess, while he believed that he was praying in a mosque amidst the Mullahs. One day while visiting an adjacent garden he saw a beautiful picture of Christ hanging on the wall. On being enlightened as to the personality of Chirst, he saw an aura proceeding from the picture and entering into himself. Coming back he was full of the Chirst-idea for three days. He saw himself within magnificent churches listening to the reading of the Bible, and sermons from the pulpit, until in vivid vision, Jesus was before him in his full glory.

All these various practices occupied him full twelve years of arduous devotion and frequent communion, and Samadhi. Within this long period he had scarcely any idea of the body, knowing not what sleep was or when to eat or drink. Such a love, and not the daily dry routine of closing the eyes and sitting still for certain hours, ensures success in the spritual life. All body-idea must go, attachment to persons, and the thousand and one objects of the senses must be given up, so that the self may be one-pointed towards the attainment of the ideal. Perfect self-sacrifice, no looking backwards and forwards, 'let the body go if it will, I will not stop till I reach the end of the path,' such iron will and perseverence. such intense yearning and concentration of purpose, can alone be blest with the attainment of perfection. There is no royal road to it.

It was this realization of the highest truth through each and every path, though apparently as opposed to one another as the poles, that made him look upon all religions as true, leading to the same goal. Hence, no more dissensions about yours or my faith, no more narrowness or shutting off of sympathy from one another, for we are all fellow travellers who may widely diverge now, in this plane of diversity, but will meet again in that one place, nay, will unite with an affinity as of one drop of water for another, in the great ocean of Reality. If this noble idea were comprehended and followed by the majority of mankind, how much narrow-minded sectarianism, unrest and useless waste of energy, bloodshed and destruction, could have been saved, and the mind full of love and fellow-feeling, calm and undisturbed, could have made rapid progress in the path that leads to freedom. To sound the trumpet note of peace among the warring

sects, by his own living example was the grandest mission of Sri Ramakrishna's life. All love for every one and not a word of abuse, ever broke forth from his lips. Members of all sects and denominations used to throng around him and would go back, each taking him to be the ideal of his own sect. Thus the Vaishnava would think him to be a perfect devotee of Sri Krishna, the Shakta would see in him a Siddha Purusha of Kali, the Advaitist would find in him a knower of the absolute and unconditioned Brahman, and so on. He would never destroy anyone's faith, but push one further in the direction that one was already going, instilling strength and helping by such advice as would be conducive to one's growth. This endeared him to all.

His relation with those who came to him was of the sweetest character. His all-embracing love for each and everybody was truly Divine. In his eyes every thing was full of life and consciousness. Sometimes he could not even pluck a flower, and felt hurt if he saw any one treading on the grass. His whole life was one grand sacrifice for the good of humanity. In the last part of his life he had the terrible disease of cancer in the throat and his doctors strictly forbade him to talk, but he couid not abide by their advice and made the case worse by talking to those who came to see him. Asked not to do so, he used to say, "What ! Ought I to mind about the body when I would be glad to take a hundred bodies even living on sago-water, if I could help one soul out of his misery of the world?' He was a sacrifice to the cause of humanity ; one who would willingly die a hundred deaths for just one soul, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the out-castc, for the down-trodden, for every one in this world.

At a time when the tidal wave of occidental materialism washed the land with its destructive flood ; when the intoxication of western ideas was too great for young minds to see any truth in Hinduism ; when they were losing all faith in the religion of their forefathers and going out to borrow foreign ideas and invest it with them, there was a man born who showed by his life that every religion in itself contains not part, but the whole of truth, if one is only in earnest for its realization and not set on mere 'leaf-counting.'

Sri Krishna voiced but the natural law of the action and reaction of forces in the universe, which history has demonstrated again and again, when he said in the Gita (IV. 7} : 'Whenever, O descendant of Bharata. there is decline of spirituality and rise of unspirituality. then I body Myself forth.'

The manifestation of this marvellous power is not confined simply to the religious sphere alone, but shines out in every plane. In India religion is the life-centre of the nation, and that was in danger. So this tremendous power in the form of Sri Ramakrishna became manifest.

And what a reactionary force it was ! Who had ever dreamed thai poor

illiterate man, born in a corner of an obscure village, would turn the life-tide of many of the most brilliant men of our country who were imbued with ideas just the opposite of his ? What a marvellous expression of power in ways least expected, least thought of ! We cannot, as we are, by our very nature grasp at once the Impersonal; we want spiritual ideals and grand spiritual examples before us, to give us strength and courage to follow them and persevere. Such a one, we have before us. Well may he be regarded as a manifestation of Divinity, but he did not come to add one more Deity to the many existing ones, to be put within a temple and worshipped, with flowers and ceremonies, but to be followed and studied, so that one may learn to act as he would act, in the same circumstances. If one can do one sixteenth, as he used to say, of what he said and did, that is enough. It is a long, long story, and it is impossible for me to attempt an exhaustive summary of his most marvellous life, in a paper like this. Each insignificant act or word of his if studied closely, would reveal volumes of teaching. For even such commonplace acts as eating and walking and talking, were marked by a peculiarity all his own—something not of this world—something of sweet renunciation, something saturated with Divine love, something of a beauty unspeakable, something taking us to a region of thought, where one, if one is a thinker, is destined to tread, losing all sense of personality. His life forms a most reliable guide-book to all travellers who have consecrated themselves to the attainment of the ultimate goal of perfection.

Though, as I remarked, an exhaustive summary of this great life is impossible, yet it is my bounden duty, when treating of such a subject, to point out at least the most important and instructive as well as the most prominent and extraordinary features of this wonderful character which like unto a flower divine miraculously blossoming on a desert shed grace and sweetness on our hard and harsh worldly existence.

Time rolls on its usual course, robbing us of our blessed childhood and landing us in youth, where we are hopelessly engrossed with vainly pursuing the fleeting shadows of this world, and before we are hardly aware of it we find ourselves going down the vale of tears! The blessed and innocent days of childhood subsequently become the cherished dwellers of the dreamland—this is the irresistible law of Nature. But, lo ! in the life of Sri Ramakrishna Nature’s law was set at naught. He was a child for life, a child, pure and simple, in the mask of a grown-up man and those who had seen him in the latter period of his fleshly existence were charmed to see this extraordinary expression of a child in his face, only divinely illumined. Perhaps the two first impressions that every visitor of Sri Ramakrishna carried away with him—be he a devout religious believer, or a sceptical and scoffing worldly soul—were his wonderful childlike

nature and extreme simplicity. Like a child he could not take care of his dress, like a child he would sometimes cry out when hungry or thirsty, forgetful of time and place, whether he was in the parlour of a rich man whom he had gone for the first time to see, or in a carriage, and like a child he could not eat much at a time, even when he said he was dying of hunger, but would take just a few mouthfuls. Like a child he could be easily consoled and satisfied. Once a gentleman went to see him when his arm was fractured. Sri Ramakrishna asked him if he had come there to see the temples. The new-comer replied, 'No, sir, I have come here to see you.' Sri Ramakrishna broke forth into a loud cry, 'What will you see Babu, my elbow-joint is dislocated. Oh, it is paining.' The gentleman was charmed with the scene and did not know what to answer. After a while in order to console him he said, 'There is no cause of anxiety, sir, it will be all right before long.' Immediately Sri Ramakrishna was as delighted as only a child could be and exclaimed 'Will it be so, will it be so ?' Then he called out to some one and told him 'This Babu has come from Calcutta, he says my hand will be all right.' Immediately he threw off all anxiety and became cheerful. He would not allow anyone to call him Baba (father). 'I am the child of my Divine Mother, how can I be anybody's father ?' Sometime he was in a state of mind when he could not do a single act, however commonplace, without going to the temple and asking his Mother's permission which he used to get readily, for to him his Mother was more real than those earthly counterparts of Her known to us.

Sri Ramakrishna was also equally simple. He never did wear the customary *Gerua* cloth of the Sannyasin. Many people came to see the Paramahamsa with the idea that they would find an unapproachably grave-looking figure clad in *Gerua*, sitting on a tiger skin, having his hair in knotted locks and *Rudraksha* round his neck, body besmeared with ashes, and surrounded by *chelas* of the same type. What they found instead, was a simple plain-looking man, with a small white *dhoti* hanging loosely from his waist, sitting on a wooden *charpoy* in a nice room, with pictures of gods and goddesses on the walls! Might be, he was amusing himself with the young men who had come to see him as if he was one of themselves. His *bon-mots* were calling forth peals of laughter from the hearers and he would continue in the same jocose and light vein, never caring what a visitor might think of the spectacle. But, lo, in a moment the scene was trasfigured. In course of conversation the subject had suddenly turned into one about God and Soul, and the seemingly frivolous man had completely lost himself into deep Samadhi, sitting motionless, eyes fixed and half-closed, tears of joy rolling down the cheeks, fingers twisted and stiff, breath imperceptible, as if the senses and the mind had left their functions for good, driven back from a plane where they have no passport to enter, where time and creation are not, but

Absolute Existence and Bliss beyond unity and duality! The Bhaktas, who had a few moments before been indulging themselves in merriment, were looking speechless on this strange transformation. Some out of the fullness of the heart were crying, some uttering aloud the name of the Lord. Such was he an unusual man, much more so, perhaps, as a Sannyasin, according to the popular idea.

Once a reputed physician of Calcutta was called to attend a patient at Dakshineshwar. On his way back he strolled by the Ganga through the temple garden of Rani Rashmani. Various kinds of flowers had come out in the cool evening air. The doctor happened to see Sri Ramakrishna walking near by. Taking him to be a gardener of the place the doctor ordered him to pluck a few flowers for him which Sri Ramakrishna instantly obeyed. What was the astonishment of the doctor, when years afterwards he came to examine his throat and cried out in amazement 'Woe to me! what had I done, I ordered *him* to pluck flowers for me!'

Such was Sri Ramakrishna's extreme simplicity in dress and manner that it appeared an insurmountable barrier, at least for once, to one of our cultured Brahmo ministers to present him to the followers of his Samaja. Once Mathur Babu, the good son-in-law of Rani Rashmani who built the Dakshineshwar temples, took Sri Ramakrishna to this grand old man of the reform party in Bengal, who was deeply affected by his devotion and Samadhi. He begged Sri Ramakrishna to favour by his presence the anniversary of the Samaj which was coming soon, but took pains to impress upon him the necessity of coming in good dress and being careful about it. The Master replied with a smile that it was beyond his power to keep thinking about his dress if that state—meaning Samadhi—came upon him. The minister, however, satisfied himself by extracting Sri Ramakrishna's promise, while parting, that he would have at least a shirt on. The next day Mathur Babu got intimation from the above gentleman that it was advisable not to bring Sri Ramakrishna, because it would look vulgar and awkward if he should go into Samadhi in such an assembly, which he was sure to do with his clothes out of orders!

I cannot but mention here an anecdote of Sri Ramakrishna's mother. Mathur Babu, being impressed by his greatness, was the first ardent and devoted follower of Sri Ramakrishna. He saw that Sri Ramakrishna's near relatives were very poor; so he wished to make some provision for them. But he could not get his wish by proposing it to the Master, for the latter sharply rebuked him for the suggestion and told him never to mention it again. Mathur Babu, disappointed, tried Sri Ramakrishna's old mother next, who was then living with Sri Ramakrishna in the same garden. He asked her what wants she felt so that he might find some means to remove them. She replied, 'My son, I cannot indeed

make out any want that I have in this world, I am so happy here. I am passing the later portion of my days on the banks of the holy Ganga, and taking the *Prasada* of Mother Kali. What more can I wish?' But Mathur Babu would not be so easily turned away. He tried again and again but in vain. He received the same answer every time. At last she said, 'Since you are so persistent to offer me something, well, buy me two pice worth of spices.' Mathur Babu was surprised with the reply, and exclaimed with joined palms, 'If you were not so, why should Sri Ramakrishna be born of you!'

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE MODERN WORLD

Swami Gambhirananda

It may seem rather difficult to connect Sri Ramakrishna with the modern world. He was born more than a century ago in a country where science and technology had not developed. His formal schooling did not go beyond that of the primary school. And too, mathematics, which is an important subject in science and technology, was a bugbear to him.

At the threshold of youth Sri Ramakrishna came to Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. His language revealed a rustic background. The Brahmos of the time said that it was not very refined. And his dress ! Devendranath Tagore, an aristocrat and the father of Rabindranath Tagore, invited him to his Brahmo Samaj, but with the precondition that Sri Ramakrishna must come well dressed. Of course Sri Ramakrishna refused, and the invitation was withdrawn.

Sri Ramakrisha was very progressive. You may remember his parable of the holy man and the woodcutter. A *brahmacarin* met a woodcutter and said, 'Go forward !' At first the woodcutter didn't understand, but when it dawned on him that the person was a holy man and that what he said must have a deeper meaning, the woodcutter did go forward and he found a forest of sandalwood. very costly wood. He cut a few pieces of it. sold it in the market and became a rich man. He did not stop there. He proceeded farther, and came to a mine of silver, then a mine of gold, then a mine of diamonds. Sri Ramakrishna often used to repeat this story and ask his devotees to 'go forward' ; they were ever to go forward.

Modern in life and thought, he visited the modern theatre, he went to see how a balloon was sent up, and he visited many institutions which were the creations

of modern civilization. He appreciated them.

Although the Divine Mother had promised him that many pure-souled devotees would come to him, with whom he would be able to talk about God, they were slow to appear.

So, in despair he went up to the roof and called out, ‘Where are you all ? Do come !’

First came the Brahmo devotees. They talked in a strange way, unfamiliar to Sri Ramakrishna. He went to his Mother Kali and said, ‘Mother, what is this ?’ And the Mother replied, ‘Well, things will happen like that in the Kali-yuga. You have to live with them.’ He agreed to live with them, talk with them, mix with them. And he did all that. When one Nepali gentleman, Vishwanath Upadhyaya, criticized him by asking : ‘Why do you go to Keshab Chandra Sen? [Keshab had been to the West, to England, and had eaten many forbidden things ; he had lost his caste.] Sri Ramakrishna replied : ‘But you, a *brahmana,* can go to the Viceroy and the Governor who are *non-brahmanas,* even non-Hindus ? You mix with them for what? For money. I go to Keshab to talk about God. What fault is there?’ So he was modern.

Then came some other devotees. The Brahmo devotees could not accept Sri Ramakrishna wholly and fully ; they thought he was just a good man living a holy life, nothing more than that. They did not find anything new in his message which could be put into action for the good of mankind, And there came other Hindu gentlemen who wanted to understand Sri Ramakrishna in terms of their own backgrounds, of what they knew about the old saints and prophets. They too failed to find any novelty in his message.

So Sri Ramakrishna wanted to meet ‘young Bengal’ the newly-educated young people, who had fresh minds and fresh energy, who could understand him with open minds and put his message into action. He wanted them. He was a modern man.

Still, he was not willing to accept everything modern without question. Science in the first flush of its machine-age success thought that it could very well take care of the world, and God could be disposed of. But then, it had not even discovered many things which we now know : there were only some hypotheses, and those hypotheses passed off as scientific truths, based on the uniformity of nature,

Then again there have been others, also passing as scientists, who have deluded people in many other ways. Take, for instance, Freud. Psychoanalysts would tell you that humans are basically beastly, full of evil tendencies that masquerade under decent ideas and supply the motive power for all action. That was Freud’s idea—that men are basically beasts. Then came the Marxists who

said that the motive power for society was money, greed. Society was moved by economic considerations and nothing else. So, between them—the psychoanalysts and the communists—they divided the world ; all humans were to be treated as beasts, and human society was just a pawn in the hands of the moneyed classes, of vested interests.

But here comes Sri Ramakrishna as a protest against both these, and he says : ‘The world is not really progressing through money and all these beastly considerations. Men are basically divine ; they are moved by divine considerations, divine inspiration. There *is* the world. There *is* Brahman. But lust and lucre come and deflect or pervert our vision. We may quote from the Upamsads, though we are applying it in another sense : ‘By the golden vessel is the face of truth covered up.’When we run after lust and lucre we don’t get truth as such. Everything becomes distorted by our hankering for gold and an enjoyable life in this world.

People talk of maya—that the world does not really exist. I am not concerned with metaphysical questions, nor was Sri Ramakrishna. But he was very much concerned with the behaviour of men, whorh he found motivated by this lust and lucre. Through their prepossessions, men form their own worlds, superimpose them on Brahman and this world ; then misread the whole thing and create trouble for themselves. As I told you, Sivanath Sastri criticized Sri Ramakrishna, that he had lost his head by thinking too much of God. And what was the latter’s retort? ‘Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity. Purity, and Consciousness. Through His Consciousness one becomes conscious of everything ; through His Intelligence the whole world appears intelligent.Sri Ramakrishna saw that it was not religion that leads one astray, but rather, lust and lucre,

We form societies, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations—for what ? For improving the world, making the world better for human living. And what do we do with them ? Our selfish considerations deflect our views. We run after things that will be beneficial to our own nations, our own societies, to ourselves, and never think of the world as a whole, never think of others as beings like ourselves, who deserve our consideration.

Strange it is that this poor man, coming from an out-of-the-way village, could declare : ‘There are two things in this world. One is *daya* (compasion) and another is *maya*. Maya is selfish love for one’s own.’ He goes further and says : ‘Even loving one’s own countrymen is maya. But loving the whole of humanity, loving the citizens of all countries, is *daya* : active sympathy for others, brotherliness towards others, helpfulness to others.’

That is how Sri Ramakrishna talked. Would you not call him a modern man ?

Perhaps much more—better than that ! Much more progressive than modern men are. I have been telling you that he considered men not as so many beasts, so many creatures made of only bone, flesh and blood ; not as mere working animals or even thinking animals. He considered them to be none other than God in so many forms. In the Upanisads we read : ‘Thou art woman, Thou art man ; Thou art youth and maiden too. Thou as an old man totterest along on a staff ; it is Thou alone who, when born, assumes diverse forms.’ It was God whom Sri Ramakrishna thus saw in everything.

There was one Hazra who criticized Sri Ramakrishna, saying, ‘You are a saint, a *paramahamsa.* You should remain merged in *samddhi,* absorbed in God. Why do you think of these youngsters—Naren, Rakhal and others—who are not even *brahmanas* but *ksatriya* boys, lower in caste?’ He also said, ‘You think of these young men with the hope of getting some help from them.’

Sri Ramakrishna was very much perplexed. He was so very simple, like a child. He went to the Mother of the Universe, Kali, in the temple, and said, ‘Here are the people criticizing me like that. What do you say to that ?’ And the reply came, ‘You love Naren and Rakhal not because they are rich, not because they are learned, but because you see Narayana, God, in them.’ Sri Ramakrishna returned assured and consoled.

Another critic was Naren himself. Sri Ramakrishna returned from the temple and told Naren, ‘You rogue ! You have been misleading me. I love you not because you are Naren or a young man. but because I see Narayana in you. The day I shall cease to see Narayana in you, I shall not be able to look at your face even.’ And to others he said, ‘You say that I love these young boys to get something out of them. What can Naren give me? He has not a torn mat to spread for me to sit down. (So poor had Naren and his family become after his father’s death that he had not even a simple meal every day.) So what do I expect from them ! I see Narayana in them. Therefore do I love them, therefore do I talk with them.’

And this was no mere talk. ‘Seeing Narayana was a matter of realization. It was not dry philosophy, got from reading different books or from talking with big intellectuals. Narayana was the reality that Sri Ramakrishna directly realized in his own life. Then only did he talk.

Take the incident of two boatmen quarrelling on the Ganga. Sri Ramakrishna’s room faced the river and he could easily see them. The boatmen started fighting, and one of them slapped the other very smartly on the back. Sri Ramakrishna cried out in pain. A little later came Hriday, his attendant and his nephew, and he said, ‘Uncle, who has beaten you like that ? I see red finger marks on your back.’ Sri Ramakrishna replied, ‘Nobody has done it. But when those boatmen were

quarrelling, I felt as though I myself had been beaten.' That is seeing God everywhere. That is becoming identified with God everywhere. That was Sri Ramakrishna's realization. And he spoke from that realization only, and not as a philosopher, not as an intellectual. He saw, he realized that Brahman is everywhere.

Another day somebody was walking on the lawn ; Sri Ramakrishna at once told his attendant. 'Go stop him ! I feel as though he were walking on my chest,'It was not a rich man's lawn either : just some newly-grown panic grass *(durva)* near the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar; still he felt like that. That is seeing Narayana everywhere. And he talked about Narayana because he saw Narayana in everyone. In his eyes, human dignity was very, very high. He saw everyone as Narayana and he expected others to do so. There was a gentleman, Mahimacharan Chakravarty, who now and then fed the poor. One day he came to Ramakrishna. Not mentioning the fact directly, Sri Ramakrishna spoke of the realization that should inspire such feeding. He said to Mahima, 'When feeding people one should think that one is pouring oblations into the very mouth of God.' He was filling in a sort of lacuna in Mahima's life. At another time Sri Ramakrishna asked a rather Europeanized gentleman, 'What is the purpose of life? What do you want to do?' Sir, I want to do good to the world.' 'Doing good to the world? How big is the world, sir ? And how puny are you ! Can you really do any good to the world ? You ean serve it. You can only serve Narayana who is in the world...,'

That was giving a new turn to service, to 'doing good to the world". To others also he often spoke like that, and corrected some wrong views that most of us stiil have. What are these ? There was Sambhunath Mallick, who told Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, I have some money and want to spend it for starting some schools and hospitals.' 'What ! Starting schools and hospitals ? What is the purpose of life, please ? If God comes to you, would you ask God for hospitals and schools, or for devotion to His lotus feet ? What is the purpose of life ?'

Still, Sri Ramakrishna himself also said, "It is good to do charity, ft is a very good thing, a good use of money, and if moneyed people don't use their money for such a purpose, I would say fie on them."

He wanted money to be well spent, but that people should not forget the real purpose of life. Just this morning I was reading in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that Mahendranath Sarkar (The physician who treated Sri Ramakrishna) came wanting to do some good to others, and 'M.' (writer of the *Gospel)* told him. 'Sir. if you came to the Kali Temple and, before seeing the Mother, went on distributing doles to the beggars, when would you see Her ? M. was of course only repeating the Master's words.

Nowadays we are thinking of improving the world, bettering it, but we are forgetting God altogether. As Swami Vivekananda said, ‘Is religion only a form of municipal activity ? Just cleaning the streets, having them well-lighted, and putting up fine buildings ? Should religion end in that alone ? Should there not be some direct contact with God?’

Sri Ramakrishna had it. He realized God and taught society that God must be placed before everything else. Do all kinds of charity, have all other things that you want for the good of society or even for your family or yourself, but when you forget God and run after these things only, you are misusing human life. Sankara says :

‘These are three things which are rare indeed and are due to the grace of God —namely, a human birth, the longing for Liberation, and the protecting care of a perfected sage.’

We have got the human life. We have also got opportunities to approach great souls. We also have some amount of hankering for God-realization. Let us not be deflected from our purpose in life by these small considerations. Not, I repeat, that we should not do good to others or do good to the world according to our capacity, but I maintain that it will not do to run after these things only, for name and fame which may often creep in unknowingly. I may be doing good work, very good work, using my money in a good way. But somehow this hankering for name and fame, for becoming well known, becoming a big man in society, may creep in and make me forget God. Sri Ramakrishna cautioned us about that, that always we must remember God and then God alone will be at the basis of all our action. When we forget God, all else is nothing.

Yet through all this, Sri Ramakrishna was still modern. He said, ‘In this Kali-yuga I find people’s minds are preoccupied with means of getting food.’ He was talking in India where poverty was and is rampant ; he was not talking in America. But if he were talking in America, perhaps he would say, ‘We have been multiplying our wants so much and we are so very busy fulfilling these wants that we have no leisure to think of God.’

So what is the way out ? It won’t do simply to say, ‘Don’t run after these wants, don’t try to get food.’ As Sri Ramakrishna said, long before Karl Marx, ‘Empty stomachs and religion go ill together. People must have food. Their minimum wants have to be supplied ; otherwise they can’t apply their minds to God.’

So, how did Ramakrishna help us in this predicament ? Well, he, Swamiji (Vivekananda), and others of the modern age knew that people must be taken just where they are, just as they are, and they must be helped to think of God under any circumstance. All cannot be placed in ideal circumstances ; that is an

impossibility. So, being a modern man, Sri Ramakrishna often said, ‘The rites and rituals and duties that are prescribed by the Vedas cannot all be practised in this modern age.’ Then what is to be done ? He said ‘You have to live in the world with your families. But just change your outlook. Don’t think that it is your family, your children ; rather think of them as a trust placed in your hands by God. You are doing God’s work by feeding them, by serving them. You are just a servant.’

To give you a more concrete example : To Sri Ramakrishna comes an old widow of the Mallick family and she says, ‘Sir, when I sit for meditation, my mind does not become concentrated.’ Now look at the fun ! An old widow, coming to a saint and saying that her mind cannot be concentrated. And where does it go ? To her brother’s little son ! Would not a saint just dismiss her, saying, ‘What a funny old lady are you, talking to me like that ! Why should your mind go to a child and not to God ?’ But no. It was Sri Ramakrishna of the modern age, and he said to her ‘Very good, if your mind goes to that child, think of that child as the little “Balagopala” ; as the Boy Krishna who has come to you in that form.’

The lady accepted the instruction, began to think like that, and through that boy did realize Sri Krishna in her life. That is the new lesson, the new outlook, that Sri Ramakrishna places before us. We have to live in the world as ordinary citizens, but then Sri Ramakrishna says, ‘Don’t you forget God. If you want to break a jackfruit which has got sticky juice, then what to do ? Just smear your hands with oil and then break it ; the juice will not stick to your skin.’

So first get some deep faith in deep certitude about God, then do your duties in the world. Let the boat float on water, but let not water get into the boat. Live in the world like the lotus leaf, which floats on the water but not a drop of water can cling to it. We are serving God by serving our families and serving our nation and serving our fellowmen. It is God for whom we have been born in this world. It is for God that we five. That must remain predominantly in our mind everywhere and every time. Then only is life meaningful not otherwise. This is the lesson that Sri Ramakrishna teaches us. There are other lessons also.

How can human beings really live in peace ? The hint has already been given to you. If we think of all of them as nothing but manifestations of God, then only there can be real brotherliness, not otherwise. If we think of people as black and white, intelligent and non-intelligent or good and bad, etc, then selfishness, the desire to exploit people for our own purposes will come in. Even the idea that they are God’s people, will not take us very far. Because “God” will be my God, the way that I think of God ; and God’s children will be those people who stick to *my* God alone and not to others’ Gods. If we are to deal with humanity as a

whole, if we are to expand our sympathies all over the world, then we have to think of one God—or rather of Brahman—who comprises everything, who is everywhere and lives through everybody. That idea of equality through the perception of divinity in all. can really bring peace to this world.

People sometimes say, ‘We are afraid of religion ; religion brings conflicts.’ Well, what docs not bring conflicts ? Do not economic considerations, politics, geographical considerations etc also bring in misunderstanding and conflict ? Why then blame only religion?

I give the example of the newly-created Bangladesh. It was originally a part of Pakistan. Muslims separated from India forming Pakistan, to live as better Muslims. Bangladesh was predominantly Muslim, perhaps 80 per cent if not more, and Western Pakistan is all Muslim. Why did they divide ? Why did the Western Pakistanis commit murder and brutality and arson in Bangladesh? It was not for religion. It was for something else. It is selfishness that really rules the world, that really spoils the world, and not religion.

Some people say, ‘You can live better by giving up religion.’ Well, don’t you find that in America people have improved themselves along with their religion ? Did not the ancient worlds. India and Greece and Rome, progress along with their religions ? It is all false philosophy, all false theories that are being thrust on us by selfish people, by scheming, misleading politicians. It is not religion that spoils people. Religion is meant for bettering people, for improving their minds and making society a better place to live in. Religion stands for morality. Religion stands for God-realization. How can it make people worse? To say that it does is false philosophy taught in the name of religion.

Then again, as human beings we have our own aptitudes, our own capacities, our own sentiments. Would you bring us all together under the same canopy and make us live the same life, all of us ? Well, that is just not possible. It never can be. We talk of some sort of democracy in religion—that all will move in a certain way. dress in a certain way, go to a certain church at a certain time, and pray in the very same way. But then, when prayer is going on, where are their minds ? Somewhere in the play-ground, maybe. Somewhere with their family, maybe. Are they al! meditating ? Are they all praying ? Well, it cannot be. That sort of democracy will lead us nowhere. You can’t fit the same coat on Tom, Dick and Harry. Each one has to have his own choice. It is said in one of the hymns to Siva :

‘People have different tastes. And according to their different tastes, they call on God in their different ways. Just like rivers flowing into the same sea, people in spite of the differences in their tastes, do all come to God.’

That is the idea of harmony preached by Sri Ramakrishna. Again I say, not a

philosophy, not an intellectual thing got by reading books, or cogitating on the matter, but a felt reality, a realized truth, that he places before us. He practised the different religions and found that they all lead to the same goal, to the same God. Only after directly realizing the goal did he talk about it. And it was not *he* who talked, mind you. Again and again he says : 'It is not I. I am just an instrument in the hands of my Mother. It is the Mother talking through me. It is the Mother who has revealed this idea of harmony, of living together in spite of our differences.'

In polities nowadays they talk of coexistence. They have coined a word and are trying to adopt it. It is a good thing. But they are failing just because of their selfish considerations, just because of their petty politics. If they meant real coexistence, as they declare, well, that would be a practical application of this theory of harmony that Sri Ramakrishna has taught us. It is through this alone, through unity in spite of diversities, that we can really pave the way for peace in the world.

But Sri Ramakrishna has also taught us another thing, and it is this : When you want to be religious, then be sincere, be earnest, be diligent. It won't do to live on the surface and just talk about these things.

Sri Ramakrishna once went to the Brahmo Samaj, the society of Keshab Chandra Sen. Keshab was delivering a sermon and he said, 'God, please grant us this that we may dive deep into the current of devotion, never to come out again.' Sri Ramakrishna heard it and then in his humorous way he said ; 'Look here, Keshab ! If you dive deep and never come out, then what will happen to those ladies behind the screen ? [In those days our womenfolk in India wouldn't come out before men. They lived mostly behind screens.] What will happen to them? 'So do one thing : you dive now and then, and come out now and then and mix with them. That way you can live.'

Religious leaders in those days did not really believe in direct spiritual realization, in really diving deep, in really meditating on God, as Sri Ramakrishna said, 'in your mind, in the corner of your house ; or in a forest—not showing your "spirituality" to others.' But still they talked big. They believed in lecturing on religion whether they were actually themselves religious or not. And they believed in organizing societies and preaching in the name of religion. To such Sri Ramakrishna said, 'All these things will not carry you very far. If you are commissioned by God, then only will all these things be effective, not otherwise.'

He emphasized that if we want to be religious, we should not live just on the surface ; we should not even think of organizing or making others religious. First, let us ourselves be religious. If you can light your own lamp, a hundred

more lamps can be lighted from it. If your lamp itself has no flame in it, with what will you light others ? If the salt has lost its savour, with what will it be salted? That is the question Sri Ramakrishna has put before us, and his answer is clear.

[Originally delivered as a talk at the Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco, on 22 October 1972].

THE MESSAGE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Swami Bhuteshananda

The message of Sri Ramakrishna is so vast and deep that it is impossible to expound it in detail. I can only touch upon a few salient points of it here. Whatever fell from the lips of Sri Ramakrishna or whatever he did was for the good of the world. Therefore I believe that whatever of his teachings that I share with you will be helpful to you in your life.

From the early days of his life Sri Ramakrishna was mad after God. God realization was his only concern in life, other things were absolutely secondary for him. He said, ‘Verily, I tell you, I know nothing but God.’ He lived for God realization; however, he wished to have this realization not for his own enjoyment but for the joy of sharing it with others. Let me give you an illustration. One day he was in a mood of deep samadhi. The mood was persisting but he was trying to keep it under control. When a man enters samadhi and gets completely absorbed in God, it is impossible for him to communicate with others. So Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother of the univesc, ‘O Mother do not make me forgetful of the external world. I want to talk to the devotees. Ordinary people cannot understand the deep singificance of this utterance. Samadhi is a state which all followers of spiritual life aspire for; it is the culmination of the pursuit of spiritual life. For Sri Ramakrishna samadhi had become natural and habitual. But when he was in the company of devotees, he tried to avoid getting absorbed in samadhi lest he should forget the world and thereby the people assembled before him be deprived of the great truth which he was eager to share with them. He was an unending fountain of the eternal wisdom derived from his various experiences of the ultimate Reality. At the same time, he was also a keen observer of the external world when he was not

absorbed in samadhi.

There are some points that Sri Ramakrishna particularly emphasized. First, according to him, God realization is the only aim of human life. Without God realization everything else is incomplete and, with God realization, nothing more remains to be attained here or hereafter. Now, what did Sri Ramakrishna mean by God realization? To put it briefly, it means an intuitive experience of the ultimate Ground of all existence in which the seer and the seen become one. God realization does not merely mean the vision of various divine Forms or having some higher feelings which may be described by different people in different ways. Complete absorption of the individual self in the Absolute: that is what Sri Ramakrishna meant by God realization. As it has been beautifully described in the Upanisads: 'Just as pure water falling into a vast sheet of pure water becomes one with it, so also becomes the self of a contemplative man who has realized God'. That is to say, in that state the individual ceases to be an individual any more. He is not lost; rather, he becomes the Absolute himself. This experience of unity is the real meaning of God realization. However, there are various other forms of spiritual realization, and Sri Ramakrishna accepted all of them. That was the catholicity and breadth of vision that Sri Ramakrishna had about God realization.

The second salient message of Sri Ramakrishna is that not only we should have that realization in our soul, but also it should be shared with others. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there were some people who, when they got any good thing to eat, would eat it themselves, wipe their lips and remain mum. They had no wish to share it with others. Sri Ramakrishna condemned such an attitude. The great realization that one achieves in the spiritual path has to be shared with others. Only then will life attain full maturity. By sharing that realization with others, by helping others reach the same experience, our experience becomes fulfilled in the real sense of the term. One day Sri Ramakrishna asked his dearest disciple Narendra (who later on became Swami Vivekananda) about his goal in life. Narendra replied: 'It is my desire to remain absorbed in Samadhi continually for three or four days, only once in a while coming down to the sense plane to eat a little food.' Hearing this, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'You are a small-minded person. There is a state higher even than that, All that exists art Thou it is you who sing that song.' The Master further said that he wanted him to be like a banyan tree with its branches spread all around giving shelter to thousands of weary travellers. This incident shows the general trend of the thought of Sri Ramakrishna. He himself took great pains to disseminate spiritual ideas among the people and to help them in pursuing the highest goal. If the first half of his life was spent in gathering the treasures of spiritual

experience, its second half was spent in sharing that wealth with other people. We now come to the third message of Sri Ramakrishna. As he put it, *yato mat, tato path,* 'As many minds,so many paths.' All paths lead to the ultimate goal of God realization. This was not a mere intellectual conviction but a fact that he himself had experienced through the pursuit of different religious paths. He was a great experimenter in this respect. After he had had God realization in one way he wanted to know how other poeple followed their paths, how they reached the goal and what that goal might be. So he followed each path, paying scrupulous attention to all the injunctions and traditions concerning it. And he invariably found that every path led to the same goal, namely, God realization. The realization itself is something incommunicable, because it is one's own innermost experience which is beyond the reach of words. But as far as words would go, he tried to describe his experiences in his own unique way, being endowed with all the knowledge of the different paths. He can thus be of immense help to the followers of different paths. That is the unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the history of world religions we never find any teacher doing spiritual experiments in the manner Sri Ramakrishna did. We find expressions of great catholicity in the scriptures of Hinduism, and, perhaps of other religions as well. The ancient Vedas declare: 'Truth is one; sages call It by various names *(ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti).* Divine Incarnations and prophets have made similar statements. But history has no record that any of these great teachers actually practised the different paths and ultimately realized the same goal through each of them. As far as we know, Sri Ramakrishna alone did it, and this is what makes his life unique. The catholicity that he taught was not just an expression of a broad mind or philosophical outlook but had a deep experiential content. It was one of the most valuable experiences that he gained through his experiments. When he spoke of other paths, it was about his own experiences of those paths that he spoke. He respected every path and never criticized any path.

Tremendous faith is necessary for strict adherence to a particular path to the end. We must have unflinching faith in the goal. But if we can have equal respect for the paths that others are following, it is so much better. Sri Ramakrishna did not ask us to accept the truth of the harmony of all paths even on the basis of his own experiments. Rather he asked us to go on experimenting on our path as well as on other paths. He has taught us not to talk of the superiority or inferiority of any path before we are in a position to evaluate properly the worth of these paths. If we can follow the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, we can look upon the followers of different paths as fellow-travellers to the same goal as ours. This message of Sri Ramakrishna is of utmost importance particularly in these days of

communal hatred and conflict. It is usually the lack of proper understnading of your own religion that makes you pass judgement on other religions. Have respect for other faiths if you can, otherwise do not pass any judgement. What is really important is sincerity. Regarding this Sri Ramakrishna said:

Whatever path you follow—whether you are a Hindu, a Mussalman, a Christian, a Sakta, a Vaisnava or a Brahmo—the vital point is aspiration. God is our Inner Guide. It doesn't matter if you take a wrong path—only you must have longing for Him, He Himself will put you on the right path.

May be, a person is not able to follow the right path; even then, if he is sincere to the backbone, God will see and guide him along that path until he reaches the goal. This is Sri Ramakrishna's view on different faiths. The differences between different religions can be eliminated, and all communal conflicts can be resolved if we take this teaching of Sri Ramakrishna seriously. Only then can we really be humble and tolerant and he able to accept the different paths as equally valid, This kind of humility born of introspection is of utmost importance in our lives today.

For God realization we must identify ourselves with spiritual life only, and everything else should be regarded as secondary. We should concentrate all our energies in a systematic manner towards that goal which is God. This earnestness, this one-pointedness born of living faith in one's goal, is absolutely necessary for progress in spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna never said that spiritual life must be pursued in one uniform way. He said that there is infinite variation in human temperament, and so there must be variety in the paths which only can enable all people to reach the goal. It you rigidly insist on one path only, most of the people will have to go without spiritual life. That is absurd, and should never he done, God has created the universe in multiple ways with an infinite variety of forms. Similarly God has created various paths for the realization of the highest Truth so that everybody may find a path suitable to him. This is the simple understanding that Sri Ramakrishna insisted upon. He wanted to make spiritual life natural to everybody and he taught his disciples never to try to impose their own ideas on anybody.

Once Swami Vivekananda, who had already accumulated sufficient spiritual power, wanted to test it by transmitting it to one of his brother-disciples. He did it and the result was that the brother-disciple to whom his power was transmitted underwent a complete change. The brother-disciple had originally been following the path of duality, that is, maintaining the relationship of the worshipper and the worshipped with God. Hut when Swamiji transmitted his power to him, he became immersed in the idea of the unity of the universe and the soul's identity with God. Sri Ramakrishna called Swami Vivekananda and

said: ‘What is this ?... .Don’t you see what harm you have done to him by injecting your attitude of mind to him? He has been progressing well till now with a particular mental attitude, the whole of which has now been destroyed,... What is done is done. Don’t act so thoughtlessly from now on. The boy, however, is lucky that greater harm has not befallen him.Swamiji remembered this teaching throughout his life, and emphasized it in several of his lectures.

Sri Ramakrishna knew that all people are not equally anxious for God realization. He divided mankind into four groups: those who live in bondage, those who are trying to get rid of that bondage, those who have achieved freedom from bondage, and those who never got involved in bondage but remain ever free. Explaining this classification, he said : Suppose a net has been cast into a lake to catch fish. Some fish are so clever that they are never caught in the net. They are like the ever-free. But most of the fish are entangled in the net. Some of them try to free themselves from it. and they are like those who seek liberation. But not all the fish that struggle succeed. A very few do jump out of the net, making a big splash in the water. Then the fishermen shout, ‘Look! there goes a big one.’ But most of the fish caught in the net cannot escape, nor do they make any effort to get out. On the contrary, they burrow into the mud with the net in their mouths and lie there quietly, thinking. ‘We need not fear any more; we are quite safe here.” But the poor things do not know that the fishermen will drag them out with the net. These are like the men bound to the world.

Most of the people are in bondage and remain ignorant of that fact. A disciple asked Sri Ramakrishna, ‘Sir, is there no way out for such people?’ The Master at once replied with great emphasis, ‘Certainly there is.’ He then pointed out the different ways open to bound souls.8 What are these ways? Taking God’s name, keeping the company of holy men, constantly thinking of God. and now and then retiring to solitude. It is good to get away, once in a white, from your usual environment, where people remain entangled in worldliness, and think about God in solitude. That way you will learn to cultivate dispassion towards the world as well as an intense desire for God realization. Thus Sri Ramakrishna has given hope to the people who are supposed to be always in bondage.

Sri Ramakrishna was the greatest optimist anyone can think of. He never thought that a person could be doomed for ever. There is always hope for everybody; he spoke only about that hope and never had a word of condemnation for anyone. Sri Ramakrishna saw even in the worst sinner the living presence of God. He recognized potential divinity and the latent power to manifest it in all people, only the sinner and the ignorant are not aware of it. Inner struggle is necessary to become aware that you have the possibility, the innate capacity, to realize your ultimate goal. This consciousness of the goal will

make you constantly discontented wherever you may be, so much so that you can never be at peace until you have reached the goal, Sri Ramakrishna holds the hope of salvation for everybody. For him there is not such thing as eternal damnation, because God resides in every being. There cannot be a being in whom God is not, in whom Divinity is not hiding itself, as it were, and waiting for its expression. Sri Ramakrishna asked people never to think of their sins but to think of the glories of God and of the way they might realize Him. and to have abiding faith in the ultimate victory of spiritual struggle. There is not a single soul for whom there is no ray of hope, for whom there is no prospect of God realization. This boundless faith in man is a most striking feature of Sri Ramakrishna's message. He was always a prophet of hope, a prophet of the ultimate victory of good over evil. Indeed, this is to be considered the main message of Sri Ramakrishna. This message of the Master is not meant only for any particular sect or particular religion. It is meant for everybody who has eyes to see and ears to hear.

Sri Ramakrishna spread broadcast the idea that, wherever you may be, the Divine Spirit is throbbing in you and waiting for an opportunity to manifest through you. You are all the children of God. Not only that, you are simply the essence of God. Only the veil of ignorance that covers the soul has to be removed, and the inner light will shine at once. Suppose, says Sri Ramakrishna, there is a room which has been dark for a thousand years. It now needs only the striking of a match for the darkness to go. It goes at once; it does not go bit by bit, although the darkness had been there for a thousand years. Similarly, a man may have been apparently sinful for many years. But that does not matter. It is only a dream; he has been dreaming that he is doomed. He has to be awakened from that bad dream. Just shake him, help him to break the dream. Then he will awaken and realize that the experience of the state of downfall was merely a bad dream, and that he is eternally free.

Sri Ramakrishna's message gives you hope, encouragement and immense amount of inspiration so that you never feel satisfied with the condition in which you are. It makes you feel 'divine discontent' and yearning for going ahead. Never remain satisfied with where you are; go ahead, and stop not till the goal is reached, says Sri Ramakrishna. To illustrate this point he gave a fine parable:

A wood cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandal-wood trees (by selling which he got a lot of money). After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine and, next, mines of diamond and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich. The idea is that we should not feel satisfied if we get some experience of joy in our pursuit of spiritual life. Spiritual

life has endless possibilities. The more we advance, the higher will be our experience. And the higher our experience, the greater will be our ability to solve our problems and the more we will find peace and joy in life. This spiritual quest must go on until our death. Only when we completely merge ourselves in the Absolute and cease to be individuals, and become free from all limitations, can we claim to have achieved the goal of life. We have to reach that one ultimate Reality which is the Absolute, without which nothing exists and beyond which there is nothing more to be attained, as the Gita says.

It is the ultimate goal which we have to seek, follow without wavering, without slackening our pace of enquiry, undeterred by any circumstances. Whatever that state may be, the ultimate experience is beyond words. It is so deep and transcendent that it cannot be communicated through words. In fact, the question of communicating it does not even arise because, in that state, other people cease to be separate entities. You become the whole world, and the sole expression of that one ultimate Reality. That is the goal we have to seek. This goal may be experienced by people in different ways; do not be confused by that. Take it for granted that there are different kinds of experience because of the differences of the experiencing mind. But ultimately all these experiences are meant to lead you towards the ultimate goal—the realization of infinite, absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, sat-chit-ananda. Beyond this no attempt has been made in the scriptures to describe the ultimate goal. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that everything in the world had been defiled by the mouth but Brahman alone had not been defiled in that way. All the knowledge that people boast of is in fact different kinds of ignorance, because they fall short of the ultimate Truth. True knowledge is that which removes all distinctions between you and the ultimate Reality. It is attained through complete purification of the mind.

I pray to Sri Ramakrishna that through his blessings we may all proceed towards the same goal, show respect towards others who are following different paths, and also be considerate towards those who remain forgetful of God and feel it our duty to help them get rid of their worldly dream.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA—LIVED IN AND WITH GOD

Swami Lokeswarananda

Sri Ramakrishna did not perform any miracles: he himself was one. Alien to common experience, his life was a wonder, to many a puzzle.

If it inspired reverence and awe, it also aroused doubt, even some

disparagement. People asked if Ramakrishna was the latest incarnation of God. On the other hand, even his chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda, wondered during their first meetings whether he was normal.

Ten years after Sri Ramakrishna's death, Max Mueller introduced him to the Western World as 'not only a high-souled man, a real Mahatman, but a man of original thought'. Later Romain Rolland presented him to the West as 'the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people'. And a great representative of these people, Mahatma Gandhi, described the story of Ramakrishna's life as 'a story of religion in practice', observing further that 'his life enables us to see God face to face'.

Yet it is not a life easy to understand. The goddess Kali, Ramakrishna's Chosen Ideal, who is no other than Time herself, alone knew who he was (The word 'Kali' comes from the word Kala, 'time.' Both Kali and time are all-consuming and all-devouring. Kali is frequently called the 'Mistress of Time'). Though many years have passed, Sri Ramakrishna remains an enigma, provoking diverse reactions and interpretations.

The debate continues. Perhaps it will continue forever. A characteristic of men such as Ramakrishna is that they always remain controversial. Many of Buddha's and Christ's teachings are still debated, and divisions among their followers continue to multiply. The difficulty is that people try to understand them through their little intellects. That is just not possible. These persons belong to another world, the world of spirituality. If you are not familiar with that world, you will never understand them. Ramakrishna would ask: 'How can an egg-plant seller determine the value of a diamond?'

Another difficulty in the case of Ramakrishna's predecessors is a lack of reliable records. In this respect, Ramakrishna is fortunate: He is not known by hearsay; everything about him is authenticated. Ramakrishna's disciple M. kept a diary which is known today as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. In this diary M. meticulously recorded Ramakrishna's everyday life, including his message to mankind. He is also the first incarnation of God to have been photographed.

Ramakrishna's *samadhi* is a phenomenon which may baffle some. What was it? Hysteria? Fortunately for future generations, the Samadhi was critically examined by Dr. Mahendra Sarkar, founder of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science and a scientist of eminence. Dr. Sarkar, an M.D. and a leading medical practitioner, pronounced no judgment on Ramakrishna's Samadhi: he was simply perplexed. He found Ramakrishna a normal person, lovable, intelligent, and extremely yet he enjoyed his talks. In fact, he had decreed that so long as he was with him, Ramakrishna was to talk to him only.

And Dr. Sarkar spent hours on end listening to Ramakrishna. His practice suffered, but he did not mind. Ramakrishna held him captive by what he said. What Ramakrishna did not say but meant is best seen in his samadhi, caught in a photograph all can now see. It is a call to the ultimate in religious experience. The smile on his face is proof of the bliss a mystic experiences in samadhi. Ramakrishna's message is in this smile.

Ramakrishna was the antithesis of most of his contemporaries, who desperately tried to copy their British masters. At a time when a little bit of English education was a password to employment, Ramakrishna refused to have anything to do with it. The only English words he knew and sometimes used were 'Very good, thank you'. He had perhaps picked them up from the conversations he had heard between English-educated Indians who loved to spice their native dialect with English words. On the same grounds he also had no interest in Sanskrit education, for he noticed that the motive behind such education was the same as the motive behind English education—earning money. If he wanted any education at all, it was that education which would give him knowledge of the highest Truth which he termed God.

When Ramakrishna was young, he often skipped his village school to attend popular plays, where under the cover of mythology, the highest spiritual truths were presented. The characters in those plays were such as one often meets in real life: representatives of good and evil, their inevitable clashes and the ultimate victory of good. Ramakrishna had a remarkable memory. He knew most of these plays by heart, particularly the songs that were included in them.

Nineteenth-century rural Bengal might have been ravaged by malaria, famine, and a host of other problems, but by and large, people were simple and friendly to one other. The cinema was unknown, but there were varieties of entertainment provided by religious festivals, which came in close succession throughout the year. Ramakrishna always looked forward to them. He enjoyed them, but also found much to learn from them.

Ramakrishna was a keen observer of everything, including human character. Nothing passed in the village from which he did not draw a lesson. Because he was discerning, he saw through things easily, and he had a strong common sense. Mankind and nature were the source of his education.

Ramakrishna was a versatile artist. He sang, danced, and told stories with superb artistry and could act the roles of various characters in the same play. He also made images of deities like a professional. Even professionals sometimes sought his help to put the final touches to eyes of the images they had made. That was the most difficult part of the art of image-making.

As a boy Ramakrishna was totally guileless, and was much sought after by

young and old alike. Interestingly, he also commanded respect from his elders, inside the family as well as outside. If there was ever a disagreement about what was right and what was wrong, invariably Ramakrishna's view prevailed. Some felt he was divine. One old man, well-versed in the scriptures, formally worshipped him, saying, 'Lord, a time will come when many will recognize you as Avatar. I will not live to see that. So, please remember that I have been the first to do you the honour due to you.' This, however, did not turn his head. He continued to be the simple playful child that he was.

When the time came for Ramakrishna's sacred thread ceremony, a great dispute arose in the family over who should be the first person to give alms to the boy. This ceremony is central in the life of a brahmin boy. The person who gives the first food that the boy begs is an important figure in the ritual. The custom was that only a brahmin could give the first alms, for it marks the formal recognition of the boy as a brahmin by the entire brahmin community.

But Ramakrishna would have none of this. As a nine-year old boy, he had promised a woman from the blacksmith caste, the midwife at his birth, that he would take his first food from her. He must do this, he said, because he had given her his word. The whole family was aghast. Everyone in the family and even neighbours pointed out that this was never done. But the boy was adamant. His argument was that a brahmin must keep his word; if he did not, the sacred thread would be a mockery. And this argument clinched the issue.

Even as a boy Ramakrishna was highly sensitive to any reference to God or any natural phenomenon of great beauty. His first spiritual experience came when he saw a flight of white cranes silhouetted against a bank of dark monsoon clouds. The sight so thrilled him that he lost consciousness. On another occasion, he was called upon to act as the God Shiva in a play. He was so overwhelmed with the feeling that he was Shiva himself that he could not speak, and he lost external consciousness when he appeared before the audience. He stood still looking like Shiva and people cheered him. At another time he was going to a temple of the Divine Mother manifest in one of Her special aspects, with some elderly women. The women asked him to sing some devotional songs. Soon after he began to sing, he was choked with emotion and was lost in ecstasy, as if he was possessed by the Divine Mother!

At the age of sixteen, Ramakrishna came to Calcutta and stayed with his eldest brother, Ramkumar. Ramkumar ran a Sanskrit school and wanted his brother to have a Sanskrit education, but Ramakrishna's mind was elsewhere. He made it clear that he was not interested in the kind of education which was meant for earning money; he was only interested in learning about God. Ramkumar did not insist, for he knew it was of no use. He was, however, happy to notice that

Ramakrishna loved to worship deities in different houses of the neighborhood, and that everybody who came to know him loved him.

Soon after this, Ramkumar moved to Dakshineswar to serve as the chief priest at the Kali temple there. Ramakrishna followed him, rather reluctantly, and became his assistant. His job was to decorate the image; this work was closest to his heart since he was an artist *par excellence*. He not only made Kali look exquisite, she looked alive under the touch of his artistic fingers.

Ramkumar was getting old and also was not well, so after some time Ramakrishna took over as the chief priest at the Kali temple. He began worshipping Kali with great enthusiasm and meticulous care. But soon he began to ask himself if Kali were a mere piece of stone. Why didn't she respond to his prayers? There was no sign that she was a living being and was pleased with his worship. He then began to wonder if there was anything lacking in himself. Perhaps he was not earnest enough to make Mother Kali talk to him. She had talked to the saint-poet Ramprasad and to other devotees; perhaps, he thought, they loved her more and their yearning was deeper. Sometimes in the midst of his worship, Ramakrishna would cry aloud, 'Mother, why are you so partial? I know I'm ignorant, a fool. Is that why you neglect me?' As evening approached, he would rub his face on the hard ground till it bled. He would say, 'Mother, another day is gone and yet you did not reveal yourself to me. What is this life for?' Seeing him, by-standers thought he had gone mad or he had just lost his mother. One day as he was doing his worship, he began to cry, saying, 'I can't bear to live without seeing you. I must end my life.' His eyes fell on the sword hanging on the wall. Seizing the sword he was about to strike himself when he saw a light emanating from Kali and advancing towards him. As it came closer, it grew in volume. He was soon enveloped by it. He fell down and lost consciousness.

After that, the relationship between Ramakrishna and Kali was as intimate as between a petulant child and an indulgent mother. Ramakrishna would demand from Mother Kali that she reveal herself to him in all her aspects. If she did not seem to immediately oblige, he would cry until she yielded. People thought he was mad. He was—mad for God. In his madness he often forgot to eat or bathe; he rarely slept. His nephew Hriday attended to his needs, otherwise he would have very likely died.

The relationship between Kali and Ramakrishna has almost no parallel in religious history. Kali was Ramakrishna's mother, guardian, friend, and playmate. He would not do anything without first asking her. To Ramakrishna, Kali was the only reality. She filled his world.

Where most mystics are satisfied with experiencing one aspect of God,

Ramakrishna wanted to practise the spiritual disciplines of other religions also. In the years that followed, Ramakrishna practised almost every faith and spiritual discipline known to religion. But, invariably, before embarking on a new experiment, he first obtained Kali's consent. He would ask, 'Mother, show me how other people worship you.' Kali seemed to like the idea and encouraged him. It was like a mother feeling happy that her child was keen to progress in education.

One interesting feature of Ramakrishna's spiritual practices was that whenever he wanted to follow a new spiritual path, a teacher would appear—as if out of nowhere—in order to help him. Tota Puri, for example, came this way. In fact Ramakrishna had not even thought of practising non-dualism, but Tota Puri came and offered to teach him Advaita Vedanta. Ramakrishna said he would have to ask his 'Mother'. Kali told him that she had arranged for Tota Puri to come so that Ramakrishna could learn non-dualism from him. If non-dualism is a difficult concept to grasp, it is more difficult to practise. Ramakrishna, however, mastered it within a few days, much to Tota Puri's amazement.

After following the different paths of Hinduism, Ramakrishna practised the spiritual disciplines of Islam. For a Hindu to practise Islam is unprecedented, if not unthinkable. Nevertheless, Ramakrishna took initiation from a Muslim spiritual teacher, and during this period, did not even enter the courtyard of the Kali temple. He wore his cloth like a Muslim, repeated the name of Allah, and said the daily prayers of Islam. No doubt, Kali approved all this. Perhaps it will be more correct to say that Ramakrishna did whatever he did at his Mother's bidding. Ramakrishna followed the Islamic path until he attained its highest realization. How did Kali feel during this time? She must have missed him, but she must have felt proud of her son.

After following the path of Islam, Ramakrishna practised Christianity. One day while visiting a devotee's house, Ramakrishna's eyes fell upon a picture of the child Jesus seated on the Virgin Mary's lap. He must have been looking at Jesus for quite some time. As he gazed at the picture, a ray of light emanated from it and entered his body. Immediately all of Ramakrishna's Hindu ideas and tendencies were pushed to the back of his mind, and he was filled with Jesus. He also had visions in which he saw Christian priests burning incense, and Christian devotees praying in churches. For three days he did not enter the Kali temple; he was completely absorbed in devotion to Christ. On the third day, he saw a tall god-like man of fair complexion walking towards him. The tall stranger was wearing foreign garments; a voice from within told Ramakrishna that this man was none other than Jesus. Approaching Ramakrishna, Jesus embraced him and entered into his body. Ramakrishna went into deep Samadhi. The two became

one.

Ramakrishna's spiritual experiences convinced him that all religions essentially taught one common truth: perfection—perfection in the spiritual sense. As Jesus said, 'Be ye perfect, even as the Father which is in heaven is perfect.' This is the essence of religion: everything else is peripheral. If there is a dispute between one religion and another, it is over non-essentials. Non-essentials vary and have to vary because of different tastes and temperaments, because of different social and cultural contexts. Ignore them, go to the essentials. There all religions are one.

Sri Ramakrishna respected every religious belief and practice. He never argued with anybody. He respected every point of view, no matter how crude it might be. He tried to point out how rich and varied religious perceptions were. It was wrong to think that there was only one path leading to God. According to Ramakrishna, there were many paths. Each path was good and valid—he knew because he had traversed each of those paths just for the joy of it. He encouraged everyone to follow the path that he or she had chosen, but he also advised people not to stop midway in their path. They must continue until they reached the end of the path. He also advised everybody not to think that his path was the only path.

As long as the goal is the same, the path one chooses does not matter. It is like choosing food according to one's taste. Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims will all eventually reach the same goal. There should be no quarrels about the way; Ramakrishna wanted to see everyone follow his or her own path, suited to his or her own temperament, to reach the goal. Each religion has produced great saints and sages, and this is the proof of its validity. He upheld not one particular religion, but each and every religion. He was as much a Hindu as a Christian, a Muslim or Buddhist. He was the sum-total of all religions. He was the representative of the beginning as well as the end of religion. What he taught was Hinduism to a Hindu, Islam to a Muslim, Christianity to a Christian. He taught the essence of what is called religion.

Ramakrishna lived in and with God. God alone was real to him. But Ramakrishna's experience was that God was everywhere, in everything, and in every being. Ramakrishna felt that the Supreme Being was his being. Ramakrishna's realizations showed him that there was in fact one single Being, but that single Being, appeared to be many because of the diverse names and forms superimposed on it. The saint and the sinner were one and the same. The same divinity was present in them, but it did not show itself equally. In the saint the divinity was shining, in the sinner it was concealed. Given love and encouragement, however, the sinner's divinity would begin to reveal itself. Gold

is always gold, even if it is covered with dirt.
Ramakrishna did not preach any creed or dogma. Nor did he reject any. His sole concern was that men and women achieve their full potential in terms of moral and spiritual growth. As far as spiritual growth is concerned, man is limitless as God. Not only that, man's love and compassion are also limitless. We have the potential of feeling ourselves to be one with everyone and everything. If there is pain anywhere, we can feel that pain as our own. If others are happy, we too can be happy. Religion is a process of growth. God is the ultimate in this process of growth. The goal of life is to reach this ultimate. This is why Ramakrishna says the goal of life is God-realization. To know God is to be God. You see Him inside yourself and you see Him also outside. You see Him everywhere and in everything. You see nothing but God.
The world is divine, so is humanity. Ramakrishna realized this. This was also his message. In short, Ramakrishna was his own message.

THE MODERNITY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S RELIGION

Swami Smarananda

To many people the idea of being modern is synonymous with the rejection of religion and all that is associated with it. Modernity is, to some others, a vague notion that is associated with rejecting the past and living a fashionable, snobbish life. In India, modernism is still an undefined concept. The modern age which began, in a sense, with the Industrial Revolution has taken rapid strides in the twentieth century. Today we are living in a world where technology is impinging more and more on social and individual life. In spite of this fact, India with a vast illiterate population, is at once associated with three ages: the ancient, the medieval and the modern.

Broadly speaking, the modern age has three characteristics : the spirit of scientific enquiry, humanism, and democracy; individual liberty ; and the idea of collective security leading to universalism as different from nationalism. Basic to these characteristics has been the concept of continual progress, leading to an evolutive and dynamic life, making man go constantly in search of new modes of enjoyment, new time-saving devices, fresh conquests of the secrets of nature.

With all, in every country, there is a tendency to seek constant change in an ever-changing world and to abhor a static condition.

If we look at Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings in the light of the foregoing outline of modern trends, we will find that his insight into the nature of man is remarkable. His prophetic vision had, as it were, anticipated the problems of modern man and given him solutions. No doubt, the notions are necessarily in the background of man's eternal purpose—that of realizing his divine nature. Of course, this goal itself is liable to be questioned by the modern man. But in the case of Sri Ramakrishna the goal was a self-evident truth that had been realized by him through spiritual experience, and what was needed was an adjustment of modern man's life to this goal. How this can be done is illustrated by incidents in Sri Ramakrishna's own life of spiritual practices and realizations.

This is not surprising if we remember that Sri Ramakrishna's guiding light is meant for the modern times. He came at a time which was, as it were, the twilight between the medieval and modern ages in India. Calcutta was then the capital of British India and leading modern intellectuals of this city were confronted by this humble Brahmin from a remote village in Bengal, untrained and uneducated in modern ways. And they found him to be more than their match.

Sri Ramakrishna's rejection of education is very significant. He branded it as 'bread winning education' and rejected it. Of course, the reference was to the knowledge of priestly profession which his elder brother Ramkumar wanted him to acquire. But by this remark his penetrative mind had rejected all kinds of 'economics-oriented' education. Modern education, particularly in India, is only economics-oriented, or still worse, job-oriented. Young people in modern times have to devote the best part of their lives in acquiring a university degree or proficiency in some trade so that they can earn a living when they grow up.

But man does not live by bread alone. The purpose of education should be to bring into blossom all that is great in the individual. Sri Ramakrishna had insisted that he would have only that knowledge by which God—the Ultimate Truth—could be known. This insistence puts the finger on the weakest point in modern education, the purpose of which is not to develop an integrated personality in the educated, but to make him fit to earn his living after acquiring his academic qualifications.

In spite of this rejection of the economics-oriented education, we perceive in Sri Ramakrishna's actions the time-spirit of modernity operating.

At the back of scientific spirit is the idea that nothing should be accepted without experimentation, without having verifiable proof in the form of direct perception by oneself or by some reliable authority. One is not prepared to

accept anything merely on belief.

We find ample evidence of this spirit in Sri Ramakrishna. Only the tools of the experiment were different. Material knowledge could be obtained through experiment in science laboratory. But for spiritual knowledge one must experiment with his own body and mind. This is what Sri Ramakrishna did. The religion he practised was not based on mere beliefs. He wanted to see the Divine Mother face to face and succeeded in doing so.

During his days of intense hankering for the vision of the Divine Mother, he would sometimes sit before the image of Kali and say to her, 'Art Thou true. Mother, or is it all a fiction of the mind—mere poetry without any reality ? If Thou dost exist, why can I not see Thee ? Is religion, then, a phantasy, a mere castle in the air ?'' Once, to test whether the Mother was real, he took a piece of cotton wool and held it under Her nostrils. Strangely enough, it moved. At last, after he had the first vision of the Divine Mother, he could have Her vision whenever he wanted and She became more real to him than the external world.

In all his spiritual practices, this attitude of a researcher was always prominent. In later life, when his disciples came to him, he always encouraged them to test everything before accepting. Narendra, the future Swami Vivekananda, once wanted to find out whether the Master's reaction to the touch of metal or coins was real. Therefore once he slipped, unknown to the Master, a rupee coin underneath his bed. When the Master came and sat on the bed, he jumped up in excruciating pain, as if stung by a scorpion. The disciples who were present tried to find out what was wrong in the bed and were astonished to find nothing more dangerous than a rupee coin! Narendra was shamefaced! But the Master reassured him by conveying his satisfaction over his disciple's attitude of testing before believing.

On another occasion he said to a disciple : 'You must examine a *sadhu* by day and by night before believing in him.' Years later Swami Vivekananda would often say : 'Do not believe in a thing because you have read about it in a book. Do not believe in a thing because another man has said it was true. Do not believe in words because they are hallowed by tradition. Find out the truth for yourself. Reason it out. That is realization.'

Thus we see that the spirit of enquiry and reasoning was not stifled in the religion taught by Sri Ramakrishna. On the other hand, these were encouraged, befitting the scientific spirit of the modern age.

Man's concern for fellow-man was not much in evidence in the Middle Ages, though Buddhism and Christianity had introduced philanthropic activities as a part of their religious practice. It is the modern spirit of humanism that has set in motion great activities of social service in the modern world.

Sri Ramakrishna's concern for suffering humanity was phenomenal. His concern for others was not restricted to the physical plane. We in the modern world often believe that only such actions as medical service etc., are philanthropic acts. But man, it must be recognized, is not merely a physical being. He lives on three planes : physical, mental, and spiritual. And humanity needs help on all the three planes.

While compassion and love are basic to all kinds of service rendered to humanity, all people do not have the capacity to serve others on all the levels. For instance, an affluent man alone can make big charities. It is not possible for a beggar to do so, Similarly, only a man equipped academically and is learned himself can help others in acquiring education and mental development. The spiritual level is the highest level of human existence. And only a person who is spiritually advanced in a great measure can help others in this direction. Sri Ramakrishna was a spiritual *teacher par excellence.* He had realized truth through hard spiritual practices over long years, and his realizations had proved to him the ephemeral nature of worldly existence. He could have withdrawn completely from the world, had he chosen to do so, designating it as *maya.* But his immeasurable compassion for suffering humanity would not allow him to do that. He yearned for a band of earnest disciples who would spread his message and bring solace to others through spiritual awakening. And in the evenings, when the temple rang with the sound of bells and conch-shells during the evening service, he would climb to the roof of the building in the garden and cry out at the top of his voice : 'Come, my boys ! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you!' A mother's yearning for her child or that of a lover for his beloved was nothing compared to the intensity of the Master's yearning for his devotees.

And when the disciples began coming, he gave himself for their sake without the least selfish thought. Even when he was lying critically ill at Cossipore during the last days, he could not be prevented from uttering a few words of spiritual solace and awakening to anyone who came to him.

Thus we see that the humanism of Sri Ramakrishna was tuned to the. highest plane of human life—the spiritual. Nevertheless, his compassion for suffering humanity in other levels was also evident on various occasions. Thus when he had been with Mathur to Baidyanath Dham on a pilgrimage, he was moved to tears by seeing poor people not having even the wherewithal for a single meal. He asked Mathur to feed them sumptuously and give them clothes, and refused to .move from the place unless Mathur carried out his wish. Sri Ramakrishna was not content in helping humanity himself ; he wanted his mission to be carried forward by Sri Sarada Devi, his divine consort, and his chief disciple

Swami Vivekananda with the help of his brother disciples. His instruction to them in this respect is significant.

Once, during his last days at the Cossipore garden house, the Master in an indrawn mood said to the Holy Mother : 'You see, the people of Calcutta appear to be crawling about like worms in the dark. Do look after them.' He impressed upon her on various occasions that she would have to continue the work of spiritual ministration after his departure from the world.

The same concern for suffering humanity was evident when he admonished Narendra (future Swami Vivekananda), who wanted to remain always absorbed in *nirvikalpa-samadhi*. He said :

Oh shame ! How can you ask such things ? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in persona! joy like an ordinary man ! ... This realization will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realize the One Divinity in all beings ; you will do great things in the world ; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor.'

On another occasion, Swami Vivekananda was startled by the Master's words : 'Not compassion, not compassion, but service of man in the knowledge that it is service of God *(Siva-jnane jiva-seva).'* When he heard these words at Dakshineshwar, he told his companions that, to him, a new light was thrown upon religious life that day.

Thus we find that Sri Ramakrishna's concern for suffering humanity knew no bounds. It was not the shallow humanism of modern thinkers. He had infused a new sense of fulfilment and a higher purpose to the concept of humanism, and made it embrace all the three levels of human existence—physical, mental, and spiritual.

Nothing could be far from Sri Ramakrishna, the God-intoxicated, than the political concepts of democracy and individual liberty. But if we have a close look at his life and teachings, we would find that the essence of these concepts have imperceptibly found a place in them, as applied to religion and spiritual life.

Democracy has for its base the concept of individual liberty. Man, by his very nature, seeks freedom and the modern man wants the greatest opportunities for its expression. But even in the modern age, individual freedom has hardly any scope in most religions. Each cult demands rigorous adherence to its principles. Some religions hold that theirs is the only true religion and that all others are false or at the most halfway houses. Such religions demand unqualified acceptance of all their dogmas. Any questioning is considered as heresy. In the Middle Ages, in Europe, one accused of heresy had to pay for it with one's life.

Therefore, religion seems very much opposed to the concepts of democracy and individual freedom.

But Sri Ramakrishna's religion, founded on the great Vedantic principles, is truly broad-based. It gives wide scope for each individual aspirant to practise whatever religion he pleases. In his religion the concept of *ista-devata* (one's chosen deity), has a pivotal role to play. For religion, which demands man's whole being for fulfilment, cannot reach its heights if curbed by inhibitions imposed by priestcraft. Only when it is practised out of one's own sweet choice can religion bear its fruit. Therefore the concept of *ista-devata,* as opposed to that of *kula-devatd* (one's family deity) was encouraged by Sri Ramakrishna,

His dictum, 'As many schools of thought, so many ways of reaching the Goal', emphasized the fact that everyone was free to follow the path of that religious practice which appealed to him most. Every great *avatara* (incarnation) preaches the doctrine that is most suitable for the age in which he appears. Earlier incarnations had emphasized the importance of the creed they proclaimed, often to the exclusion of other creeds. Only Sri Krishna who preached the synthetic gospel of the Gita was an exception. In the modern age, when the concept of individual freedom is in ascendancy, Sri Ramakrishna's liberal religious ideas have helped religion to withstand the onslaught of new ideas.

Alongside of the concept of individual freedom, the idea of collective security and universalism is making headway in the modern world. Often it is thought that the concept of individual freedom is opposed to that of collective security and therefore it should be curbed by all means. Inherent in this conflict is the suspicion that individual liberty may deteriorate into licence to the detriment of society as a whole. This suspicion is not baseless ; instances of such a deterioration of individual liberty are not wanting.

Applying this idea to religion, one may consider it desirable that all humanity-should be converted to one religion. Such a belief has led in the past to the rise of proselytism and consequent religious wars and conflicts.

But religion in its higher reaches is essentially individualistic. Otherwise, there can be no spiritual practice. But that does not mean that one should impose one's religion on others. Collective security and universalism lie in allowing each man have his own way, without impinging upon the other man's interests. This is particularly true of religion, where fanatical zeal to propagate one's own belief to the detriment of others retards spirituality.

It was to demonstrate true universalism, therefore, that Sri Ramakrishna accepted all kinds of religious beliefs and practised many of them in his own life at different times. He did not approve of criticism of even such religious

practices which had in them the potentiality to debase a *sadhaka* (religious aspirant) and lead him away from the goal. Thus, once when Narendranath railed vehemently against a particular sect given to immoral practices, he put in quietly: ‘But, you see, there is a backdoor entrance also to every house. These religious practices are backdoor entrances to spirituality. Some aspirants may find them suitable.’

Thus in Sri Ramakrishna’s religion individual freedom and collective security were not conflicting ideologies but complementary to each other, and these two together led to universalism.

It is also significant that Sri Ramakrishna was aware of some of the acute social problems of modern India. The simple unpremeditated solutions that became revealed in his conversations are unique. Thus we find that his solution to the caste problem is striking. He said that devotees had no caste—they all belonged to the same caste. Love of God purifies and unifies all. All distinctions of caste or social status, race or colour, disappear through its purifying influence. Therefore if men turn their attention to the essential aspects of religion, the social differences will melt away into nothingness.

Similarly, the position of women, which is even today an unsolved question in many countries, was raised to the highest level by Sri Ramakrishna. For him every woman was an embodiment of the Divine Mother and as such worthy of respect. He himself had worshipped Kali, the Divine Mother, all his life. One of his chief preceptors was Bhairavi Brahmani, a learned nun. He respected highly his own wife and worshipped her as the embodiment of the Divine Mother.

When one of his monastic disciples, then a young men, said concerning women.. ‘Oh, I cannot bear them !’, he reproved him saying, ‘You talk like a fool! Look down upon woman! What for? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Bow down to them as your mother and hold them in respect. That is the only way to escape their influence....’

Indeed, today in India, the position of women is vastly different from what it was some fifty years ago. Nevertheless, there is a great scope for improvement. And that can come about on the basis indicated by Sri Ramakrishna.

Thus we find that the religion preached by Sri Ramakrishna was meant for the modern man, and significantly enough he came at the dawn of the present age. In his own words, ‘The coins that were legal tender in Mogul times, cannot be so in British times!’ Similarly, though the truths preached by prophets who preceded Sri Ramakrishna have an eternal value and are applicable to all times, the methods of religious practice advocated by them were meant for the times and

climes in which they lived. Sri Ramakrishna's advent was in modern times and he spent most of his life in a modern city coming in close contact with modern men, recognized for their accomplishment of head and heart. In this modern setting he presented the eternal verities of *Sanatana Dharma* in a language that was simplicity itself, spiced with his exceptional sense of humour, and these verities the modern man needs most if he is to understand the world around him in a clearer perspective.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND ISLAM

Swami Prabhananda

On Friday, 7 September 1883, Sri Ramakrishna was seated in his room at Dakshineswar with his devotees, reminiscing about his earlier spiritual experiences. He said: One day I had the vision of Consciousness, nondual and indivisible. At first it had been revealed to me that there were innumerable men, animals, and other creatures. Among them were aristocrats, the English, Mussalmans, myself, scavengers, dogs, and also a bearded Mussalman with an earthenware tray of rice in his hand. He put a few grains of rice into everybody's mouth. 1 too tasted a little. Sri Ramakrishna narrated the same experience again on 12 April 1885 as follows :

How many other visions I saw! But I am not permitted to tell them. Someone is shutting my mouth, as it were. I used to find no distinction between the sacred *tulsi* and the insignificant *sajina* leaf. The feeling of distinction was entirely destroyed. Once I was meditating under the banyan tree when I was shown a Mussalman with a long beard. He came to me with rice in an earthen plate. He fed some other Mussalmans with the rice and also gave me a few grains to eat. The Mother showed me that there exists only One, and not two. It is Satchidananda alone that has taken all these various forms ; He alone has become the world and its living beings. Again, it is He who has become food.

The above experience which the Master had in the course of his practice of Islamic *sadhana* is a unique event in the history of religion. Apart from its mystical significance and theological interest,, it has opened a new vista for all-embracing brotherhood on the social level and an all-inclusive harmony of religions.

Although born and brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family, Sri

Ramakrishna practised all religions. The desire to realize the ultimate Truth in different religious traditions led him to the practice of the spiritual disciplines of Islam, Christianity etc. He not only utilized their techniques of worship and meditation but also followed their ways of life, acquired their frames of mind, thought their thoughts and realized the highest truths cherished by them. Thereby he experientially proved that the different religions of the world are but different paths leading to the same ultimate Reality. He was neither a syncretist nor an eclectic, but the prophet of a new way of harmonizing world religions on the basis of some universally valid common principles without ignoring the uniqueness of the values and customs of every tradition. This great achievement of the Master which holds immense possibilities for mankind has created a stir among thoughtful people the world over. But owing to negligence, nearsightedness or indifference, it has not received the attention and study that it deserves. In this essay we shall try to analyse Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Islam and his experiences therein, and also to point out their implications.

Soon after the end of Sri Ramakrishna's continuous absorption for six months in *nirvikalpa samadhi,* he devoted himself to the practice of Islamic mysticism. This was a radical departure from the more traditional forms of Hindu *sadhana* which he had been practising for twelve long years, One might think that by that time his mind had been solidly cast in an unbreakable mould, but just the opposite was the case. Having realized the unity of existence through his monistic experience, he transcended all strictures of caste, creed and ceremony and became the embodiment of catholicity. Sri Ramakrishna made no difference between the Hindu, the Christian and the Muslim, and was able to move freely among all.

But the spirit of universal acceptance is not enough to explain the purpose and significance of the Master's practice of Islam and other religions. For that we have to take into account his unique disposition of mind that sought variety in religious experience. His 'taste' for things spiritual was unlimited, and could not be contained or satisfied within the sectarian bounds of any religion. About this he said, 'Do you know my attitude ? I love all the preparations of fish. I have a womanly nature. ... I feel myself at home with every dish—fried fish, fish cooked with turmeric powder, pickled fish. And further, I equally relish rich preparations like fish-head, *kalia* and pulau. Defending his attitude, he explained the rationale of his approach to 'M': 'Let me tell you one thing. In a game of *satrancha* a piece can't reach the centre square until it completes the circle ; but once in the square it can't be overtaken by any other piece.' His precepts were but the reflections of what he had realized in his life. He said, 'I had to practise each religion for a time—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed

the path of the Saktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling ; but the paths are different.'

Swami Saradananda has fixed 1866-67 (B. S. 1273) as the year when Sri Ramakrishna practised Islam, whereas Sashibhusan Ghosh places it in B. S. 1275 (1868-69). Circumstantial evidences, however, support the former view. Romain Rolland too accepted the end of 1866 as the period when Sri Ramakrishna started on it. The Master was then only thirty.

Sri Ramakrishna's teacher in Islamic devotion was the Sufi mystic Govinda Rai of Dumdum. Sri Ramakrishna's biographer Swami Saradananda writes about Govinda Rai.

Hriday said that he was a Kshatriya by birth. He was perhaps learned in Persian and Arabic. Having studied various religious doctrines and come into contact with different religious communities, he was at last attracted by the liberal doctrine of Islam and was formally initiated into it. Govinda accepted the Islamic faith thirsting for religion, but we cannot say how far he followed its social manners and customs. But, since he became initiated, he, we are told, engaged himself ardently in the reading of the Koran and in religious practices according to the process prescribed by that scripture. Govinda was an ardent lover of God. The method of worshipping God according to the teaching and mental attitude prevalent among the Sufis, followers of a sect of Islam, seems to have occupied his mind ; for, he now became engaged day and night in practising devotional moods like the Dervishes, the devotees belonging to that sect.

Hriday also tells us that Govinda Rai had made the Kali temple at Dakshineswar his temporary home, accepting its hospitality and meditating under the shade of the Panchavati. Govinda Rai's Islamic name was Wajed Ali Khan.

Among the Indian Muslims there are three major sects : Shiya, Sunni and Sufi. The Sunnis are the largest in number whereas the Sufis are close to the Vedanta of the Hindus. According to liberal scholars, Sufis represent the mystical tradition of Islam but the 'fundamentalists' consider the Sufis a heretic fringe sect. A Sufi studies the life of Muhammad *(sira)* to comprehend his code of conduct *(sunna)*, and to be intimate with the traditions *(hadith)* handed down from generation to generation. The Koran is the first pillar and the *hadith* is the second. The third pillar demands of a Sufi that he diligently try to imitate the *auliya* (friends of God, the saints) and learn how these holy men conduct themselves. He must commit to mind and heart the words of wisdom and sanctity, and songs of devotion and heavenly love. A Sufi living a life of sincere obedience to the Will of God passes through the various states *(ahwal)* and

stages *(maqamat)* of the spiritual pilgrimage. A successful Sufi hopes to have a glimpse of immortality even in this mortal life by passing away from self *(fana)* into the consciousness of survival in God *(baqa).* After death and judgement he aspires to dwell forever with the angels and prophets in the blissful Presence of the Almighty.

Sri Ramakrishna was attracted towards the humble and devout Sufi Govinda Rai who remained absorbed in his prayers at the Panchavati, Being charmed by the latter's sincere faith in and love for Allah, he felt a spontaneous urge to worship God in this way also. It is not known if he had received permission from the Divine Mother, as he had for his Tantric and Advaitic *sadhana.* When he asked Govinda Rai to initiate him, the latter complied gladly.Though we do not have the details of the initiation, it can be safely assumed that Sri Ramakrishna had to utter thrice the *Kalimah,* which reads *la Ilaha illa'llahu : Muhammadun Rasulu'llah* ('There is no deity but God ; Muhammad is the Apostle of God.'). Thus Sri Ramakrishna became a Muslim for the time being, and set his heart and soul to the practice of Islam. Fully equipped with attraction *(injizab),* devotion *(ibadah)* and elevation *(uruj),* the three aids necessary for a Sufi for his journey to the temple of the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna could naturally be expected to progress fast in his spiritual practice. But a spiritual virtuoso that he was, he took an incredibly small amount of time, as he did in the case of Tantric disciplines, to attain the highest realization. He later on reminisced :

I then, devotionally repeated the holy syllable 'Allah', wore cloth like the Muslim, said Namaz thrice daily and felt disinclined even to see Hindu deities, not to speak of saluting them, in as much as the Hindu mode of thought vanished altogether from my mind. I spent three days in that mood, and had the full realization of the result of practices according to that faith.

Curiously enough, Sri Ramakrishna underwent such a total transformation of his mental structure during the practice of Islam that he did not even once enter the inner courtyard of the Kali temple but lived in the *Kuthibari* (bungalow) of Mathuranath, from where he had the pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses removed. He deliberately blotted out the thought of even Mother Kali. It has been said that he was 'ready to eat forbidden food'. A horrified Mathuranath begged him to desist from this and, as a compromise, had food prepared by a Brahmin under the direction of a Muslim. Sri Ramakrishna's behaviour, apparently like that of a bigoted Muslim during this period, sprang from his steadfast devotion to the Islamic spiritual practices. It reveals his extraordinary sincerity and earnestness. He was not a dogmatist who says, 'My religion alone is true, and the religions of others are false.'

We hear Sri Ramakrishna telling Naren and other devotees on 28 September

1884, ‘I received the Allah mantra from Govinda Rai. Rice with onions was cooked for me in the bungalow *(Kuthibari).* I ate some.’ During these three days of worship of God as Allah, the compassionate Ruler of the Universe, he would frequently dive deep into the ecstatic mood while uttering ‘Allah’ and would have the vision of the Prophet Muhammad.

From Hriday, nephew of Sri Ramakrishna, it is learnt that during the period of his practice of Islam, Sri Ramakrishna went to the nearby mosque one day and said his Namaz. Another version of the same incident can be seen in *Sri Ramakrishna Punthi.* One day Hriday, Sri Ramakrishna’s nephew, not finding him in his living room, went out in search of him and found him in a nearby mosque offering his Namaz. Gurudas Burman’s *Sri Sri Ramakrishnacarit* gives an almost similar description. Some additional information has been provided by Ramlal Chattopadhyay, another nephew of Sri Ramakrishna. At a short distance from the main entrance of the Dakshineswar temple there was a mosque, in front of which Sri Ramakrishna was seen one early morning. The caretaker who had come to open the door of the mosque noticed him. Sri Ramakrishna was wearing a cloth in the fashion of the Muslim. Among those who had assembled there for prayer one could readily recognize Sri Ramakrishna. Along with the Muslims Sri Ramakrishna offered the Namaz. Thus he worshipped Allah there for three days.

At 16/9 Trailokyanath Biswas Road is located the mosque, popularly called Mollapara mosque, on a plot of land measuring 0.9 acre as described under dag no. *1679.* The Wakf Commissioner’s order dated 1 July 1952 in respect of this mosque (in E. C. No. 12055) mentioned. ‘The Wakf estate mosque is associated with the hallowed memory of the great saint Ramakrishna Param Hangsha Deb and it is reported that he used to cry *azan* in it.’ The same order appointed an ad interim *Mutwalli* (caretaker), Janab Seikh Jalal Ahmed and four Hindu gentlemen. The Commissioner of Wakf visited the mosque again on 19 July 1976. In his report the Commissioner wrote, ‘Next...took me to Molla-para mosque, Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna Deb used to perform *Namaz* and cry *azan* and also listened to Holy Quran from a Moulavi for sometime.’ This Order appointed an administrative committee of five persons, four Muslims and one Hindu, for ‘the purpose of upkeep and management of the Wakf estate appertaining to E. C. No. 12055.’

The present Mutwalli of the Mollapara mosque is Arique Hossain, aged 25, whose mother tongue is Urdu. He lives at the Baranagar Jute Mill School quarters, Calcutta. This mosque was perhaps established 200 years ago. In Mollapara there lived a large number of Muslim families. But the locality was practically deserted by the Muslims after the communal disturbances there in 1950, and scarcely a Muslim is found there now. The mosque has been enrolled

as a Wakf property as per the Commissioner of Wakf's Order dated 1 July 1952.

Another interesting anecdote connected with Sri Ramakrishna and this mosque may be narrated here. One day at the mosque Sri Ramakrishna met with an old Fakir whose moustache, beard and hair all had turned grey. Wearing a gaberdine on his person, a string of glass beads around his neck, and a staff in his hand, the fakir smilingly welcomed Sri Ramakrishna saying 'You have come, very good, very good.' He also blessed Sri Ramakrishna by waving his hand.

Sri Ramakrishna's biographer Swami Saradananda says, 'At the time of practising Islam the Master at first had the vision of an effulgent impressive personage with a long beard; afterwards he had the knowledge of the all-pervading Brahman with attributes and merged finally in the attribute less Brahman, the Absolute, Analysing the nature and content of Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic realization just mentioned, one can distinguish three distinct stages or phases. The first has to do with the Personal God with form about which Claude Alan Stark remarks :

'It is a matter for speculation only whether the 'radiant Person with long heard and grave appearance' was the Prophet Muhammad himself, one of his companions, or a great Sufi saint who had chosen to maintain separate identity from Allah in a subtle body in order to continue as an instrument of salvation for others, much like the *bodhi-sattvas,* the Christian saints, or the Shikh gurus.

The second stage of his realization refers to the Personal God without form, that is, Sri Ramakrishna's experience of Allah as *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman.* It refers to the formless aspect of God yet with name, quality and attributes. The majority of Muslims worship God in this aspect.

The third stage relates to the impersonal aspect of the God-head. In this phase of superconscious experience Sri Ramakrishna merged his identity with that of the Absolute. Naturally this reminds us of the unitive experience of Sufi mystics like al-Hallaj who boldly declared *'ana'l-haqq'* ('I am the truth')."

Thus we find that Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic experience involved harmonization of three distinct aspects of divinity : the personal God with form, the personal God without form, and the Impersonal. Normally, these aspects of the Reality can be realized by seekers of truth in evolutionary stages only.

An important fact deserves special mention. Contrary to his other visions, the radiant personage with long beard did not merge into the person of Sri Ramakrishna. From this Sri Ramakrishna, according to Baikunthanath Sannyal, came to the conclusion that Muhammad was not an incarnation of God, but a God-sent prophet.This deduction by Sri Sannyal is perhaps not dependable, for every year special offering is made to Muhammad as the God-incarnate, along with the other God-incarnates during worship on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday and

this tradition must have had its origin in some authentic statement of the Master accepting Muhammad as an Incarnation of God.

On the evidence of Swami Saradananda, Govinda Rai, like the other gurus of Sri Ramakrishna, had a new spirit infused into his own religious life. Also, perhaps, he was blessed to realize, through the divine life and power of Sri Ramakrishna, those hidden truths which he had been unable to experience in spite of his *sadhana*. No details, however, are known, nor is it known when he left Dakshineswar or how he passed the latter part of his life.

We may recall here more anecdotes connected with Sri Ramakrishna and his practice of Islam.

When he was a child, Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna's name in childhood) once travelled in the company of his mother Chandramani to his maternal uncle's home at Sarati Mayapur. On the way the mother and the child visited the famous *dargah* (sacred tomb) of a *Pir* (Muslim saint) near Sarati Mayapur. There the child quietly sat in deep ecstasy for quite sometime.

Again, Gadadhar, then 9, went alone to witness the *namaz* on the occasion of *Id* at a village near Kamarpukur. On his way, close to the ground of *namaz*, he was standing under a peepul tree when he had a divine vision, lost his external consciousness, and remained in that state for two hours and a half.

There is a small mosque, called Geratala mosque (also called Kassem Ismail Madan Wakf mosque) at premises no. 142 and 142A Chittaranjan Avenue, Calcutta, at the northeast corner of the crossing of Chittaranjan Avenue and Mahatma Gandhi Road. It is enrolled under Wakf Commissioner's office on 9 May 1952 under enrolment No.12057. Its present Mutwallis are Soleman Md. Doplay of 14 Pollock Street and Babubhai Azim Salehji of 19 Amratala Lane, Calcutta. One evening Manmathanath Ghosh, who had visited Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar several times noticed something unusual on the road as he was returning home from his office. Dusk was approaching. One Muslim fakir, standing in front of the Geratala mosque, was calling out in a passionate voice, 'Come my Beloved, Come.' Streams of tears were rolling down his cheeks. Charmed by his divine fervour, Manmatha stood there looking at the fakir when Sri Ramakrishna suddenly appeared on the scene. Sri Ramakrishna was returning from Kalighat temple to Dakshineswar in a carriage in the company of his nephew Ramlal. Getting down from the carriage, Sri Ramakrishna rushed towards the fakir. The two lovingly embraced each other for quite some time.

Sri Ramakrishna steeped in the love of the Divine Mother as he was, had a divine vision which is relevant here. On January 1883 he narrated his experience thus :

My Divine Mother is not only formless, she has forms as well. One can see

Her forms. One can behold Her incomparable beauty through feeling and love. The Mother reveals Herself to Her devotees in different forms...,She came to me another day as a Mussalman girl six or seven years old. She had a *tilak* on her forehead and was naked. She walked with me, joking and frisking like a child.

From the reminiscences of Sashibhusan Samanta, son of Pitambarchandra, store-keeper of the Dakshineswar temple, we have another interesting piece of information. It is said that Rani Rashmani was residing in the bungalow *(kuthibari)*, supervising the temple's construction, when one night she saw Baba Gazi Pir (literally, 'a Muslim warrior who later became a saint') in dream. The spirit said : 'I reside under the shade of the peepul tree on the northeast bank of the pond of Gazi. I am adored by Hindus and Muslims alike. Pave my residence with bricks and arrange to offer me *sinni* daily and lamp in the evening. I shall bless you.' Rashmani carried out the behest and appointed a Muslim caretaker for the purpose. Sashibhusan, as a young boy, had seen Sri Ramakrisha visiting the place of Gazi Pir every morning and also occasionally in the afternoon and saluting the Gazi Pir. He also offered *sinni* to the Gazi Pir. The Gazi Pir is said to be known as *Alam Gazi Pir* according to the local tradition. As one of the proofs of the abiding influence of Islamic experience on Sri Ramakrishna's life, we may mention some Muslims among his devotees and admirers. Sashibhusan Samanta mentions the names of some of them. They are : Sheikh Abdul Sobhan, Sheikh Barkutulla, Sheikh Namdar, Sheikh Kamdar, Sheikh Macham Mollah, Sheikh Khatir Mistri and Sheikh Maniraddi. Most of them lived in and around Mollapara. Again Ramlal, nephew and long-time attendant of Sri Ramakrishna, refers to an old Muslim fakir Ustagar by name. He lived on the northern side of the main entrance of the Dakshineswar Kali temple. He used to call on Sri Ramakrishna now and then. Both of them would take their seats on the northern veranda of Sri Ramakrishna's room and talk about Islam. On hearing the soul-stirring words of Sri Ramakrishna the fakir would sometimes shed tears of joy. On every such visit Sri Ramakrishna used to give him some food to eat. The fakir would accept it with humility, salute him and go back to his cottage.

The anonymous author of the Bengali book *'Sri Sri Ramakrishna-pradarsita Visvajanin Dharma'* published in 1895 mentions an equally interesting incident :

On the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's visit to our house Amritalal Sarkar, son of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar brought one Muslim physician to meet Sri Ramakrishna. After observing him for sometime the physician was deeply moved. Though he did not touch Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he vigorously danced with his two hands raised along with others to the accompaniment of music in the courtyard. Later on, he partook of *prasad* and heartily thanked Amritalal for giving him the opportunity of having this kind of an experience.

At the request of Ramachandra Dutta, Dr. Abdul Waziz of Satkshira, Khulna (now in Bangladesh) went one morning with his friend Abbas Ali, Deputy Magistrate, to see Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The visit brought a transformation in the life of Dr. Waziz and he became a staunch admirer of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Kumud Bandhu Sen, an old devotee of Belur Math who was well acquainted with all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. has narrated another incident which reveals the Master's love for the Muslims.

I was returning by bus to Belur Math one evening. On the way a gentleman sitting by my side turned to me and asked, 'Do you, sir, belong to the Sri Ramakrishna Math?' I answered, 'Yes, why would you like to tell me something? He started, 'In my childhood I came to learn from my father—who had passed away some years ago—about an incident in connection with Sri Ramakrishna. Something really mysterious. We are Mohammedans, you know, and our homestead was not far from Kamarpukur. We keep a small shop at Chandni in Calcutta. I will now repeat what I learnt from my father's lips :

Economically we belong to the middle class. We had a thatched house and a barn adjacent to it. But due to some evil turn of fate, our house and barn would catch fire every year. This happened not once or twice but several times, and we were terribly worried about it, I was one day relating this sad state of affairs to a Brahmin friend of mine when we saw Sri Ramakrishna passing in a procession along the village road dancing and singing the glories of God. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna my friend said to me, 'Seek the protection of that great soul. He might free you from all your strange plight.' I approached Sri Ramakrishna with great humility and saluted him. He then compassionately asked me, 'What's the matter, my child ?' I replied, 'Sir, we are a middle class family and are burdened with too many dependants but, as ill luck would have it, our house and barn invariably catch fire every year. And we are reduced to paupers. I seek your refuge. Please find some way out.' Sri Ramakrishna inquired where my house was. Pointing it out I said, 'Please see, the ashes are still there.' Sri Ramakrishna then asked the members of his party to wait, and he himself proceeded to the spot along with me. On almost reaching it he asked me to bring some jujubes (a kind of fruit). Taking those jujubes in hand, Sri Ramakrishna asked me to go round the whole area on foot. I started accordingly, and Sri Ramakrishna followed me with those fruits in his hand. He was muttering inaudibly something and would throw the fruits at intervals. When I had covered the whole area I stopped. Sri Ramakrishna asked me if I had completed the round. On my answering him in the affirmative, he left me to join his party. After this never again did our house and barn catch fire and we, for our part, are immensely

grateful to Sri Ramakrishna for that.

In fact Sri Ramakrishna mixed with all people irrespective of their caste, creed or station in life, and treated them as if they were his own. His attitude has been very clearly expressed by what he said to the Brahmo devotees :

When you mix with people outside your Samaj, love them all. When in their company be one with them. Don't harbour malice toward them. Don't turn up your nose in hatred and say : 'Oh, this man believes in God with form and not in the formless God. That man believes in the formless God and not in God with form. This man is a Christian. This man is a Hindu, And this man is a Mussalman,' It is God alone who makes people see things in different ways. Know that people have different natures. Realize this and mix with them as much as you can. And love all. But enter your own chamber to enjoy peace and bliss.

Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart, behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment. You can see your true Self only within your own chamber. The cowherd take the cows to graze in the pasture. There the cattle mix. They all form one herd. But on returning to their sheds in the evening they are separated. Then each stays by itself in its own stall.

This significant statement not only shows Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with the people of other religions, but also teaches how one can practise the harmony of religions without hampering one's own spiritual growth. The mis-understanding, discord and violence which have at times embittered Hindu-Muslim relationship in India can be permanently resolved only by sincerely practising this advice of the Master.

On the question of Hindu-Muslim relationship Sri Ramakrishna had his own view. He did not dismiss the problem as some well-intentioned liberals do. Admitting the stark reality, he said: 'There is, as it were, a mountain of difference between them. Their thoughts and faiths, actions and behaviour have remained quite unintelligible to one another in spite of their living together for so long a time.' Swami Saradananda thinks that Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Islam has opened a new way for the people of these two alien religions to come close to each other. But how soon ? To find out Sri Ramakrishna's answer to this we may refer to one incident. Once Sashi (later Swami Ramakrishnananda) was studying the scriptures of Islam, perhaps with a desire to locate the points of accord between the two religions. Sri Ramakrishna, one day, said to him, 'It will take a long time as yet to achieve the harmony, for there lies a mountain of difference between the two. However, it will be achieved in the future.'

The dilemma of religious plurality, though a serious one, cannot be resolved by theological speculation or by reference to scriptural authority. Sri

Ramakrishna, who crossed the boundaries laid down by the dogmas of faith, culture and practice, arrived at the heart of the problem and found a solution. Based on his own experience he argued :

I see people who talk about religion constantly quarreling with one another. Hindus, Mussalmans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas, Saivas, all quarrel with one another. They have not the intelligence to understand that He who is called Krishna is also Siva and the Primal Sakti, and that it is He again, who is called Jesus and Allah. There is only one Rama and He has a thousand names.

Though the terms 'Brahman', 'Visnu' and 'Allah' may vary considerably in conceptual orientation, Sri Ramakrishna outstepped the limitations of concepts and thought-forms and directly realized God as He is. This realization, whatever may be the form of that realization—dualistic or non-dualistic—is a solid meeting ground for the people of the two faiths. But over and above the unity of religions, Sri Ramakrishna's overiding concern was for the unity of God and of the approaches to God.

It is of course true that ordinary Muslims may be disappointed to find that Sri Ramakrishna did not even memorize a few hundred verses from the Quran or the *Masnavi* of Rumi. But Sri Ramakrishna dared to cut accross the traditional and orthodox bounds of Hinduism to participate in the communion with God through Islamic mysticism. Muslim fundamentalists who do not give enough credence to Sufism are likely to ignore Sri Ramakrishna's Islamic practice and experience. Also it may legitimately be argued that Sri Ramakrishna had not fulfilled the specific social conditions of actually being a Muslim. But no serious student of religion should fail to note the deep significance of Sri Ramakrishna's communion with God in the context of Islam. This is not only unique in the history of hagiography but also offers a welcome solution to the dilemma of religious plurality.

It is also to be noted that Sri Ramakrishna's daring experimentation has drawn appreciation from Islamic scholars too. One such scholar, Muhammad Daud Rahbar, writes :

'I pay tribute to Sri Ramakrishna's device to attain intimacy with Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian life. He demonstrated his own kind of desires and overtures, as against other possible ways of going about the enrichment and broadening of experience. He went about in a certain mystical way. It is valid, interesting, and meaningful because its motivation was pure.'

Sri Ramakrishna's contact with Islam was not limited to a period of only three days. Besides, his casual contact with Islamic tradition in the early days, his realizations following his Islamic practices left an abiding influence on his life and teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna's experiences in Hinduism, Christianity and Islam suggest a method and model of dialogue for men and women of divergent religious beliefs and practices. Sri Ramakrishna found out that different religions are paths leading to the same goal, the attainment of everlasting peace. He said, 'All people are seeking the same Truth ; the variance is due to climate, temperament and names.Historical circumstances led to the development of different religions, and also to the accumulation of error and superstition in them. Sri Ramakrishna used to say:

Mother, everyone says, 'My watch alone is right.' The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Muslims, all say, 'My religion alone is true.' But mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee ? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path.

Through this yearning Sri Ramakrishna reached the state of *Vijnana*. He understood that every religion was both a pathway and a stumbling block. He encouraged every sincere aspirant to overcome errors and superstitions and press on to the Truth at the core of religion. He gave this answer : 'Hindus, Mussahnans, and Christians are going to the same destination by different paths. A man can realize God by following his own path if his prayer is sincere. Sri Ramakrishna kept everyone's ideals intact. He asked a Vaishnava Hindu to hold to his attitudes, and a Muslim to his. Thus he revalidated the Vedic declaration : Truth is one, wise men speak of It differently. Though the Reality is one and the same it appears differently through name and form. The mature spiritual experience of *vijnana* ensures the realization of this truth. As a true *vijnani* Sri Ramakrishna could lay aside his own perspective, even his own convictions and beliefs and take on the life and beliefs of the Muslim neighbour. He thereby paved the way for a loving interreligious relationship.

The principle of *vijnana* taught and experienced by Sri Ramakrishna harmonizes both non-dualism and dualism as two poles of existence. Through it Sri Ramakrishna proved existentially, though not perhaps metaphysically, that all religions are paths that lead to the same goal. This constitutes the basis of his spiritual, practical and humane solution to the ever-increasing problem of communal strife between Hindus and Muslims. In this doctrine of *vijnana* Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna's torchbearer and commentator, found a deeper social significance. In a letter dated 10 June 1898 Swamiji wrote to Sarfraj Hossain, 'practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally. On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone. Therefore I am

firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind....For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam— Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.'

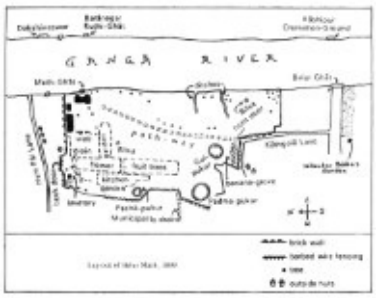
Sri Ramakrishna's approach was not to synthesize Hinduism and Islam into one religion, nor did he simply strive for the revival of Hinduism as had often been alleged. What he wanted was a rejuvenation of the spirituality behind every historical religion, not only for men's emancipation but also for his all-round development. Emphasizing the baneful influence of credal religions Swami Vivekananda wrote:

My Master used to say that these names as, Hindu, Christian, etc., stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now only stand as a baneful influence under whose black magic even the best of us behave like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and must succeed.

To secure a permanent cure, the spirituality behind historical religion needs to be emphasized and better rapport between the followers of different faiths needs to be established.

Baranagore Math –early days

Alambazar Math-early days



The Blue print

Old monastery and shrine, Belur Math

Swamiji’s room from the Ganges-in early days

Swamiji’s room , Belur Math

48. Sri Ramakrishna idol at Belur Math Sculptor : Gopeswar Pal

Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math- a grand edifice imbibing Various architectural Patterns

Inside View of the Ramakrishna Temple-the sanctum sanctorum(idol) at the long end with the pillars and the corridor resembles the inside of a cathedral.

The logo of the Ramakrishna Order as designed by Swami Vivekananda

Swamiji’s memorial temple, Belur Math

THINKERS AND LEADERS

—In awe and wonder

IN THE EYES OF HIS COUNTRYMEN

Who art Thou, lying here
Upon Thy Brahmin mother's lap,
Filling the worlds with light ?
Who art Thou, born in this poor hut,
O naked babe, Thou jewel without a peer,
Who art Thou, O my dear?
Hast Thou compassionately come down,
Seeing this wretched world's unhappy plight?
Hast Thou come down alone
To shower Thy mercy on the afflicted soul,
To others all unknown?
Thy face is full of kindliness :
For whom dost Thou so weep and cry ?
Thy beauty dazzles me
So that I cannot turn my face from Thee !
O sweet destroyer of the heart's unrest.
Thee would I hold for ever to my breast !

Girish Chandra Ghose *(Translated By John Moffitt, Jr.)*

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Upadhyaya Brahmabandhava

Who is Ramakrishna ? Well, that I do not know. But this much I can say that in the firmament of Bengal no other moon of such sweetness has risen since Lord Gauranga. 1 have compared him with the moon ; even the moon is not spotless, but this moon of Ramakrishna is absolutely free from all spots. Ah ! his divine body was pure and bright like fire itself. Never was it contaminated by the slightest touch of sex. When he was married his wife was only six. Full ten years

after marriage he met for the second time this lady, who was chastity personified. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped womanhood in this lady, just stepping into the prime of her youth—yes, he worshipped her, not figuratively but literally with all the rituals of Hindu image-worship—and made an offering of his holy rosarv at her feet. Since this consecration, Ramakrishna shone in his fullest splendour like the full-moon with its bright halo. It is a beauty unique in human history. Many saints and prophets there were who had renounced their wives for God ; but this renunciation of Ramakrishna is no ordinary renunciation, it is the height of acceptance. The light of the moon cannot live apart from the moon. Nor did this lady, the incarnation of chastity, live apart from Sri Ramakrishna. Ever since that unique worship of this lady of sixteen, she was always by the side of Ramakrishna, even like his halo. Go once and sit for a while at the blessed feet of this lady, so reverentially worshipped by her divine consort, and if you *can* have her grace and blessings on you, then your sanctified self will be able to understand and realize Sri Ramakrishna, you will be blessed indeed.

Who is this Ramakrishna? He is one who attained the highest realization of Brahman—a stage where the realizer and the realized become one. And of this Brahman, Ramakrishna would speak : all the truths contained in the scriptures of the world have been uttered, have been expressed in words through the mouth, but this Brahman or the knowledge of Brahman has not been expressed, it is inexpressible. It is like a dream of a dumb man who feels the intensity of it, would do anything to give expression to it, but cannot.

Who is this Ramakrishna? He is the prince of Sadhakas, who through his spiritual practice, so rich with emotion and fervour, gathered round him all the peculiar spiritual attitudes of the different sects and faiths of the world, and thus demonstrated the all-comprehensiveness of his Brahman-realization. In his personality have been synthesized and unified the superconsciousness of the Yogis, the sweetness of the love of the Gopis of Vrindaban, and the awe-inspiring attitude of the Sakti worshipper. He practised Islam and realized its highest goal. He also realized the Christhood of Jesus. Fully established in his consciousness of the immutable Brahman and keeping intact the continuity of the Eternal Dharma of the Aryans. Sri Ramakrishna welcomed with open arms all the diversities of the spiritual life and enriched India by incorporating in it all the new spiritual forces and orientating them all to Advaita.

Sri Ramakrishna is the heroic conqueror of sex and greed, is one to whom Brahman-consciousness is as natural as breathing ; he is the crest-jewel of devotees, the saviour of mankind, and the deep ocean of the grandest spiritual synthesis.

Salutations to this Ramakrishna.

*[Translated from the original, cotributed to **Swaraj**, a Bengali monthly]*

PARAMAHAMSA RAMAKRISHNA

Pratap Chandra Mazumdar

My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me. What is there in common between him and me ? I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centered, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? I, who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Brahmo Samaj—why should I be spellbound to hear him? And it is not I only but dozens like me who do the same. He has been interviewed and examined by many, crowds pour in to visit and talk with him. Some of our clever intellectual fools have found nothing in him, some of the contemptuous Christian missionaries would call him an impostor, or a self-deluded enthusiast. I have weighed their objections well, and what I write now, I write deliberately.

The Hindu saint is a man under forty. He is a Brahmana by caste, he is well-formed in body naturally, but the dreadful austerities through which his character has developed appear to have disordered his system. Yet, in the midst of this emaciation, his face retains a fullness, a child-like tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile that I have seen on no other face that I can remember. A Hindu saint is always particular about his externals. He wears the *gerua* cloth, eats according to strict forms, refuses to have intercourse with men, and is rigid observer of caste. He is always proud and professes secret wisdom. He is always Guruji, a universal counsellor and a dispenser of charms. This man is singularly devoid of such claims. His dress and diet do not differ from those of other men except in the general negligence he shows towards both, and as to caste, he openly breaks it every day.

He most vehemently repudiates the title of Guru, or teacher, he shows impatient displeasure at any exceptional honour which people try to pay to him, and emphatically disclaims the knowledge of secrets and mysteries. He protests against being lionized, and openly shows his strong dislike to be visited and praised by the curious. The society of the worldly-minded and carnally-inclined he carefully shuns. He has nothing extraordinary about him. His religion is his only recommendation. And what is his religion ? It is orthodox Hinduism, but Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (for that is the name of this saint) is the worshipper of no particular Hindu god. He is not a Saiva, he is not a Sakta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these.* He worships Siva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedanta doctrines. He accepts all the doctrines, all the embodiments, usages, and devotional practices of every religious cult. Each in turn is infallible to him. He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms Akhanda Sachchidananda (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). His religion, unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu Sadhus, does not mean too much dogma, or controversial proficiency, or the outward worship with flowers and sandal wood, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire and lasts long hours. While his interlocutors are weary, he, though-outwardly feeble, is as fresh as ever. He merges into rapturous ecstasy and outward unconsciousness often during the day, oftenest in conversation when he speaks of his favourite spiritual experiences, or hears any striking response to them. But how is it possible that he has such a fervent regard for all the Hindu deities together ? What is the secret of his singular eclecticism ?To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being Who is unchangeable in His blessedness and the Light of Wisdom...

He has successfully escaped the evil of carnality which he dreaded. His Mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kali, made him recognize every woman as Her incarnation, so that he now honours each member of the other sex as his mother. He bows his head to the ground before women, and before little girls ; he has insisted upon worshipping not a few of them as a son might worship his mother. The purity of his thoughts and relations towards women is unique and most instructive. It is the opposite of the European idea. It is an attitude essentially, traditionally, gloriously national. Yes, a Hindu *can* honour woman....

... So the other sin, which he spent his life to be free from, is the love of money. The sight of money fills him with strange dread. His avoidance of women and wealth is the whole secret of his matchless moral character. For a long time he practised a singular discipline. He took in one hand a piece of gold and in the other a lump of earth. He would then look at both, repeatedly calling the gold *earth*, and the earth *gold*, and then shuffling the contents of one hand into the other, he would keep up the process until he lost all sense of the difference between the gold and the earth. His ideal of service is absolute unworldliness and freedom from the desire of gain....

Nor is his reverence confined within Hinduism. For long days he subjected himself to various disciplines to realize—the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the Koran. His reverence for Christ is deep and genuine. He bows his head at the name of Jesus, honours the doctrine of his sonship. and we believe he once or twice attended Christian places of worship. These ideas at all events show the catholic religious culture of this great Hindu saint.

Each form of worship that we have tried to indicate above is to the Paramahamsa a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion, and the accounts of discipline and exercise through which he has arrived at his present state. of devotional eclecticism are most wonderful, although they cannot be published. He never writes anything, seldom argues, he never attempts to instruct, he is continually pouring out his soul in a rhapsody of spiritual utterances, he sings wonderfully, and makes observations of singular wisdom. He unconsciously throws a flood of marvellous light upon the obscurest passages of the Pauranic Shastras, and brings out the fundamental principles of the popular Hindu faith with a philosophical clearness which strangely contrasts with his simple and illiterate life. These incarnations, he says, are but “the forces (Shakti) and dispensations (Lila) of the eternally wise and blessed Akhanda Sachchidananda who never can be changed or formulated, who is one endless and everlasting ocean of light, truth and joy.”....

If all his utterances could be recorded they would form a volume of strange and wonderful wisdom. If all his observations on men and things could be reproduced, people might think that the days of prophecy, of primeval, unlearned wisdom had returned. But it is most difficult to render his sayings in English.

A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is this good and holy man. He has wholly controlled his flesh. It is full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity. As a Siddha Hindu ascetic he is a witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world. His testimony appeals

to the profoundest heart of every Hindu. He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. His spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied, endless wisdom, his childlike peacefulness and affection towards all men, his consuming, all-absorbing love for God, are his only reward. And may he long continue to enjoy that reward ! Our own ideal of religious life is different, but so long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality and inebriation in the love of God.

[Extract from the *Theistic Quarterly Review,* October 1891]

Rabindranath Tagore

To the Paramhansa Ramakrishna Deva

Diverse courses of worship
From varied springs of fulfillment
Have mingled in your meditation
The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite
Has given form to a shrine of Unity in your life
Where from far and near arrive salutations
To which I join my own.

Brojendra Nath Seal

He [Sri Ramakrishna] sought to experience each religion in its entirety in *sadhana* or spiritual discipline....Here was an individual soul who would enrich himself all human experience in religious life and history. And precious elements were thus added to his Hindu heritage—the sense of human brotherhood and equality from the Muslim faith, and the need of salvation *from sin* from Christianity. In the same way, Vaisnava *sankirtana* and music were added to his religious exercises. These became elements *(angas)* of his *sadhand.* What we want is not merely Universal Religion in its quintessence, as Rammohun sought it in his earlier days,—not merely an eclectic religion by compounding the distinctive essences, theoretical as well as practical, of the different religions, as Keshub Chandra sought it, but experience as a whole as it has unfolded itself in the history of man, and this can be realized by us, as Ramakrishna taught, by syncretic practice of Religion by being a Hindu with the Hindu, a Moslem with

the Moslem, a Christian with the Christian, and a Universalist with the Universalist, and all this as a stepping stone to the Ultimate realization of God-in-Man and Man-in-God."

Sri Aurobindo

The world could not bear a second birth like that of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in five hundred years. The mass of thought that he has left, has first to be transformed into experience ; the spiritual energy given forth has to be converted into achievement. Until this is done, what right have we to ask for more? What could we do with more?

Religion always, in India, precedes national awakenings. Sankaracharya was the beginning of a wave that swept round the whole country, culminating in Chaitanya in Bengal, the Sikh Gurus in the Punjab, Sivaji in Maharastra, and Ramanuja and Madhavacharya in the South. Through each of these, a people sprang into self-realisation, into national energy, and consciousness of their own unity. Sri Ramakrishna represents a synthesis, in one person, of all the leaders. It follows that the movements of his age will unify and organise the more provincial and fragmentary movements of the past.

Ramkrishna Paramahamsa is the epitome of the whole. His was the great super-conscious life which alone can witness to the infinitude of the current that bears us all ocean-wards. He is the proof of the Power behind us, and the future before us. So great a birth initiates great happenings. Many are to be tried as by fire, and not a few will be found to be pure gold ; but whatever happens, whether victory or defeat, speedy fulfilment or prolonged struggle, the fact that he has been born and lived here in our midst, in the sight and memory of men now living is proof that

'God hath sounded forth the trumpet
That shall never call retreat !
He is sifting out the hearts of men
Before His judgement seat;
Oh, be swift my soul, to answer Him;
Be jubilant, my feet!
While God is marching on!'

[Karmayogin, 19th March 1910]

The passage quoted [from *Synthesis of Yoga*] is my considered estimate of Sri Ramakrishna:

‘Nor would a successive practice of each of the yogas in turn be easy in the short span of our human life and with our limited energies, to say nothing of the waste of labour implied in so cumbrous a process. Sometimes, indeed, Hathayoga and Rajayoga are thus successively practised. And in a recent unique example, in the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first divine straight to the Divine realisation, taking as it were the kingdom of heaven by violence and then seizing upon one yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of god by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge.’ 3rd February 1932.

Mahatma Gandhi

‘The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They therefore leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna’s life was an object-lesson in Ahimsa. His love knew no limits geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all.

Sarojini Naidu

In the garden of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, there stands an empty temple made of stone and one day, when I was giving the Kamala Lectures to the University, the last day it was, I walked with him in his garden. He said to me, ‘Have you found the text of today’s address?’ I said, ‘No.’ Then he said, ‘You will find the text of your address here.’ I walked with him and looked at the birds, trees, statues and at last I stood before that empty temple, when he said, ‘Poet, have you found your message?’ I said, ‘I have.’ Here is an empty temple in which there is no image because every worshipper must find in the empty temple the knowledge that he creates God in the image of his own soul. That is the message to the world of all great saints and prophets of the world and that

was the message of Sri Ramakrishna. For him the temple was always empty, because it was always ready. It was always ready for him to place his deity, no matter whether for a moment he projected himself into the soul of the Mussulman or the Christian or the Confucian or the Zoroastrian or the Sikh or any other faith. He said, ‘Here is a temple of humanity and humanity must have a God. Where shall I find Him? Shall I produce Him in my limited individual consciousness? Or God shall be so infinite and so diverse that I shall seek Him in the image of the Infinite as He appears to his children in the deserts of Arabia, or on the mountaintops, in the caves and in the forests of many lands. And Sri Ramakrishna taught us that the temple remains empty because love alone can create an image of God and with that love, you are not limited, you become a part of the great humanity that worship God by many names.’

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

While the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna did not penetrate so much into academic circles, they found their way into lonely hearts who have been stranded in their pursuit of pleasure and selfish desires. Under the inspiration of this great teacher there has been a powerful revival of social compassion. ...He has helped to raise from the dust the fallen standard of Hinduism, not in words merely, but in works also.

Sarat Chandra Bose

This great teacher [Sri Ramakrishna] was Bengal’s contribution to the world in the last century. ...We and the rest of the world came under the influence of his teachings during his early pilgrimage and even more so, after he had completed his journey. ...To my mind, Sri Ramakrishna’s mode of approach to different systems of worship .inculcated in the different religions of the world is his special contribution to the history of the progress of religions in the present age. ...Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings did not disturb a single religion of the world. ...He left no new religion as his legacy unto us. He did not ask anybody to change his religion with a view to realizing God. ...His teachings prove that each religion gives ample scope and opportunity to realize God. That was the distinctive peculiarity of his teachings. Towards the end of his sojourn into this world Swami Premananda, one of his disciples, heard him pray, ‘Mother, do not let me become famous by leading those who believe in beliefs! Do not expound beliefs through my voice.’

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

From Vivekananda I turned gradually to his master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Vivekananda had made speeches, written letters, and published books which were available to the layman. But Ramakrishna, who was almost an illiterate man, had done nothng of the kind. He had lived his life and had left it to others to explain it. Nevertheless, there were books or diaries published by his disciples which gave the essence of his teachings as learned from conversations with him. The most valuable element in these books was his practical direction regarding character-building in general and spiritual uplift in particular. He would repeat unceasingly that only through renunciation was realisation possible —that without complete self-abnegation spiritual development was impossible to acquire. There was nothing new in his teaching, which is as old as Indian civilisation itself, the Upanishads having taught thousands of years ago that through abandonment of worldly desires alone can immortal life be attained. The effectiveness of Ramakrishna's appeal lay, however, in the fact that he had practised what he preached and that, according to his disciples, he had reached the acme of spiritual progress.

The burden of Ramakrishna's precepts was — renounce lust and gold. This two-fold renunciation was for him the test of a man's fitness for spititual life. The complete conquest of lust involved the sublimation of the sex instinct whereby to a man every woman would appear as mother... I doubt if I have passed through a more trying period in my life than now. Ramakrishna's example of renunciation and purity entailed a battle royal with all the forces of the lower self.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa obviously was completely outside the run of average humanity. He appears to be in the tradition of the great *rishis* of India, who have come from time to time to draw our attention to the higher things of life and of the spirit...One of the effects of Sri Ramakrishna's life was the peculiar way in which he influenced other people who came in contact with him. Men often scoffed from a distance at this man of no learning, and yet when they came to him, very soon they bowed their heads before this man of God, and ceased to scoff and 'remained to pray'. They gave up, many of them, their ordinary vocations in life and business and joined the band of devotees. They were great men and one of them, better known than the others, not only in India but in other parts of the world, is Swami Vivekananda.

C. Rajagopalachari

It is no exaggeration to call Sri Ramakrishna's teachings an Upanishad. A sage like the *rsis* of old was born in our age. This was Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.... Learned men with a command of language can and do write excellent essays and discourses. But this writings lack true life. Sri Ramakrishna was a *mahatma* who saw God in his heart "and in all things in the world outside". He saw Him in all things with the same certainty and strength of feeling with which we see each other.... There is a peculiar power in the words of those who lead a godly life. They have a force which the exhortations of merely learned and intellectual men do not have. When a *maharsi* talks, it is his whole life that speaks through him, not mere intellect.

Pramathanath Tarkabhusan

Through the earthly body of Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavan ,Sri Hari [Narayana] manifested His divinity in Bengal. ...Sri Ramakrishna appeared in a time full of surprising incidents. ...This period had witnessed the involvement of many talented personalities in developing and nurturing numerous new thoughts and the consequential conflicts as well. ...Sri Ramakrishna has his advent among all such luminaries, and led an apparently easy worldly life of a priest devoid of wealth or education. And that exactly was his unique and amazing feat — ignoring all the limitations he could achieve his revered place among the Indian spiritual giants. ...

... Sri Ramakrishna's influence on the world could hardly have the extraordinary and everlasting impact without Vivekananda. And Narendranath Datta, in obverse, would never have become Swami Vivekananda without the compassion and adoration— unsolicited but abundant, from Sri Ramakrishna. ...He gave his mantle to the Swami and through him inspired all pervading peace, harmony and spirituality around the civilized nations. It was he who did first realize how such massive benevolent work could have its fruitful end in the contemporary time, and awakened the required force within the enormously powerful and broad heart of the Swami. This in particular was the greatest aspect of the amazingly eventful life of Sri Ramakrishna.

To know and realize Brahman—the *atman* taught in the Upanishads of India —is the highest goal of human life. This is the message of India. To teach this message of India in a new form adopted to the needs of times, and through India to human beings all over the World, who on account of ignorance have the misfortune to identify themselves with the body and suffer torment and worry,

thus lead them to freedom from all kinds of bondage, God appeared on earth as Paramahamsa Deva. My countless salutations to the holy feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, the visible symbol of the Lord, ushering in a synthesis of the religions of the world!

Dr. Zakir Hussain

God-intoxicated Saint, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, was one of the very great ones in that great army of the spirit, marching down the corridors of time under the Indian sky... Sri Ramakrishna used to say, do not speak of love for your brother. Realize it. Do not argue about doctrine or religion. There is only one. All rivers flow to the Ocean. Flow and let others flow too. The great stream carves for itself according to the slope of its journey according to race, time and temperament, its own distinct bed. But it is all lie same water. Go, flow on towards the Ocean.

Hiren Mukherjee

It was Ramakrishna's unalloyed, if also apparently unsophisticated, love for all beings overflowing so beautifully that its nectarine quality never fades, his humility, that he wore like a natural garment, humility, however, which had not a tincture of passive piety but gleamed with sheer certitude over his own intimate realization, and the simple sublimity of his equation of *jiva* with Siva (that is to say, of every sentient being with the godhead) — all this and so much more beyond the purview of this talk that places the Paramahamsa on a peerless pedestal where vying with West or East becomes irrelevant and petty.

If there has been anybody in modern times who symbolized, without the least trace of solemnity and scholasticism, the *Brihaddranyaka Upanisad's* definition of religion as 'the honeyed essence of all creation' *(sarvesam bhutanam madhu)*, it was Ramakrishna, in his quintessence 'the beauty of holiness'. ...It was Ramakrishna, unconcerned about contentions over superiority between East and West and vice versa, from whom, essentially, Vivekananda had learnt, rather imbibed, as one does one's mother's milk, that 'not princes or prelates and periwigged charioteers' but the common, earthly people, suppressed cruelly for ages but never entirely vanquished, are the salt of our earth.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar, C.I.E.

(Speech delivered at the unveiling ceremony of Sri Ramakrishna's portrait at the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad,

Calcutta, on 14th December, 1935)

Today this Parishad is sanctified by having a picture of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva in its bosom. During his lifetime he had shown the way to Freedom to thousands of devotees. Everyone had recognized in him one who had really seen God. Amongst those who had seen him and recognized the manifestation of the Great Power in him are to be found not only Hindus but also Brahmos like Keshab Chandra Sen, and rationalists like Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar. Whether we believe in an Avatara or not, all of us recognize that light can be transmitted through the help of sparks of fire. It is many years since the earthly life of Paramahamsa Deva came to an end. But the light that he brought to this world is still burning. Even today millions of people, men and women, rich and poor, scholars and the illiterate, the happy and the miserable, the high caste and the low, reading his life and hearing his teachings, have been able to tune their life to a higher key. His life has brought solace to many a heart afflicted with sorrow and has shown that the Kingdom of Heaven can be brought to this earth.

The father is recognized most through the son ; that is why the greatest gift of Sri Ramakrishna is Swami Vivekananda who has brought about a new epoch in Bengal and India by inseparably combining with the Jriana and Bhakti Yogas of his Guru, that Karma Yoga which is so very essential today. Let the portraits of these two great prophets of this age shed their pure light and remain for ever effulgent for this nation on their road to Freedom.

Prof. Humayun Kabir

(Speech delivered on the 114th birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.)

I feel that in meeting here today in memory of one of the greatest men India has ever produced in the last century, the community in Delhi are doing an honour to themselves and in remembering the services and the examples of Sri Ramakrishna we today have before us the example of a personality who tried to live and explain the different aspects of human functions, of which we have very few equals in our country’s history. 1 do not want to talk to you very much or to devote myself to describing the various aspects of his character. I want just to tell you as one who does not know very much about the background of his Sadhanas or the different ways in which he expressed himself throughout his life, as a common man who has been impressed by one particular aspect of his character and teachings. That is what 1 want to place before you—I mean his

emphasis upon service.

We had reference today again and again to his preaching of toleration. In his own life he tried to realize truth in its different manifestations, to recognize the value of the contribution of different types of human endeavour to the achievement of salvation. But the aspect to which I want to draw particular attention, the aspect which has impressed me, is his emphasis on toleration, on service. To my mind his emphasis on toleration is only a development of the aspect of service to humanity which you find paramount in all his life and which inspired all his activities and all his sayings. Once he told Swami Vivekananda, another of the greatest personalities of modern India. lf you go to serve people in a spirit of condescension, you will never do any good by that. So long as you serve people, there is no question of your trying to show mercy, there is no question of showing compassion as is ordinarily understood. What is wanted is compassion in the true and literal sense of the word, compassion by which you identify yourself with others, And it seems to me that his emphasis on toleration rests on this emphasis upon compassion in the sense of identifying oneself with humanity, identifying oneself with the individual of whatever colour, whatever creed, whatever religion, whatever race, of whatever nationality. And in his life he exemplified this sense of identification with all human beings. Anyway, to my mind that is also the greatest teaching of true democracy and Sri Ramakrishna in his own way emphasized the dignity of the individual.

The speakers before had placed before you the different aspects of his character, that he was humbler than the humblest, that he accepted truth from whatever source it came. But all this was due to the recognition of the dignity of the individual and that was again due to his sense of identification with others. This gave to him a stateliness which you find associated with men you call ascetic. By an ascetic we sometimes mean one who denies all pleasures of life. But in his case there was no question of a sense of constraint. There was no negative attitude. He was as simple as a child. This we could see in all his sayings, in his beautiful parables by which he illustrated his vision of truth. Whatever type of man one might be, he recognized the individual and identified himself with those whom he came into contact with. In this respect you can find very few people who have surpassed him. The greatness of Sri Ramakrishnna, the beauty of Sri Ramakrishna, thus lies in this sense of identification with human beings, the recognition of the value of the individual.

If that sense of the dignity of the individual can permeate to some extent our lives as well, then and then aione can we have any lasting peace in this world. This has inspired the whole of the Ramakrishna Mission. The wonderful humanitarian service that its members are carrying on in different parts of the

world in spite of all kinds of difficulties, individual sufferings and tribulation is because that they have got something of the spirit of the Master, and they have precisely tried to put into practice what he taught.

Dr. V. V. Giri

(Speech delivered on the Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary Public Meeting on 23 February 1969, at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi.)

I deem it a privilege to be here today to offer my respectful homage to the sacred memory of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa on the occasion of the 134th birthday celebrations of this great saint whose influence and message transcend the boundaries of our motherland and also whose philosophy goes beyond the limitations of any sect or religion. I have had the privilege of reading a few works on Ramakrishna Paramahamsa when I was in jail in the forties and also read the collected works of Swami Vivekananda recently when I could to some extent comprehend the principal tenets and teachings of these great personages. What struck me most in reading about Ramakrishna was his simple and common approach to problems and his philosophy is one which could be understood even by an ordinary man not well-versed with the nuances and technicalities of highly intellectual approach to problems of religion. The quintessence of the message of Ramakrishna. If I may sum up in one word is ‘Humanism’ and that naturally has drawn me closest to his writings. What Ramakrishna preached is as relevant today as it was when he propounded them and I have no doubt in my mind they will continue to inspire mankind for ages. His many allegories and anecdotes from the day to day life of the people are simple and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa could drive a point home which even the most ordinary person could understand.

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was indeed a realized soul who could sift the chaff from the grain and separate the pure milk from the water. The essence of all philosophies, he could sum up in a few simple words and he could draw many adherents and followers because he preached what he practised and practised what he preached. An embodiment of infinite religious ideas. Ramakrishna rendered the monastic order founded by him broad-based and comprehensive in its outlook. While many other religious movements did not succeed in full measure because of their sectarianism, Ramakrishna Mission because of its robust universality is spreading not only in our country but throughout the world. Ramakrishna was indeed a wonderful gardener, for he made a bouquet of different flowers radiating many hues and colours and

exuding varieties of fragrance.

The life and teachings of Ramakrishna constitute one of the few unifying forces in the welter of present-day conflicts and tensions. The imperative words which fell from his lips are reaching human hearts and reverberating throughout the nooks and corners of the Mother Earth for his message transcends time and space and has a direct and universal appeal, attracting all types of people, no matter what their background or their faith is. He was the fountain-head of spiritual enlightenment and sublimity. He attained a state of 'Bhawa-Mukha'—a state in which the mind could ever dwell in the Divine both in its absolute and relative aspects, and yet without the least distraction from this union, apply itself actively to the mundane affairs of life. He was established in a state of inward bliss, mental equipoise and radiant joy.

'The story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. This is how. Gandhiji has depicted Ramakrishna's greatness. He was the embodiment of all religions. By sheer dint of his relentless *'tapasya'*, dynamic vigour, scintillating intellect, profound insight into the mine of spiritual values, Ramakrishna has carved out for himself an abiding niche in the hearts of the people. His utterances and actions bear the stamp of a spiritual genius. Ramakrishna left behind him a band of spirited disciples to carry out his work for the well-being of humanity. After the passing away of Ramakrishna in 1886, a monastic order bearing his name was organized by his devout disciples headed by the illustrious Swami Vivekananda. From the inception it set up a two-fold activity of preaching Vedanta and social work irrespective of caste, creed or colour.

The greatest contribution of Ramakrishna was to draw as his principal disciple young Narendranath and who after being ordained became Swami Vivekananda and who brought name and fame not only to Hinduism but to India. The refreshing catholicity of thought, the capacity to perceive in every religious system sublime elements which elevate and ennoble life, the intense, stormy religious fervour which Ramakrishna possessed in such a remarkable degree, and the deep mysticism which was evident behind his devotional ecstacy—all these were transferred to Narendranath as if by a magic touch. The young disciple in turn was prepared to carry out the mission "of arousing the Indians from their stupor to shed fear and face the world with confidence."

Swami Vivekananda, the cyclonic Hindu as he was called, was more concerned with removing the poverty from the earth and the emphasis he laid on his master's teachings of work and patriotism placed him on the lofty pedestal much above the common Sanyasis. Strength of character and physical well-being were given proper emphasis as the major requirements for developing the

personality of an individual and he himself said, ‘What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one of burning love—selfless. That love will make every word tell like a thunderbolt. Awake, awake, great souls! The world is burning in misery. Can you sleep?” Again Swamiji thundered. “Strength is the one thing needful. Strength is the medicine tor the world’s disease. Strength is the medicine which the ignorant must have when oppresed by the learned.”

Swami Vivekananda did not preach a philosophy of inaction. He stressed the fact that work was worship. ‘Work work and work’—that was his motto. He said, ‘If a man curses the world, goes into a forest, mortifies his flesh and kills himself little by little by starvation, makes his heart a barren waste, kills out all feelings, and becomes harsh, stern and dried up—that man has missed the way.’ There is the strong current of humanitarianism and consideration for the poor and the downtrodden which runs through all his thoughts, writings and speeches. Positive fearlessness, incessant work and continuous striving towards the goal should he the guiding spirit of every activity. According to him, ‘If there is a sin in the world, it is weakness ; avoid all weaknesses, weakness is sin, weakness is death.’ Here is a new interpretation of religion exploding the myth that religion or spirituality was only a negative approach to life.

Vivekananda often mentioned in his work of the economic tetters and social barriers which stifled all progress. He therefore wanted the misery and poverty to be liquidated from every hearth and home. His foremost desire was to wipe out the tears from every eye. He believed in the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden, in popular education and the young Indians standing on their own legs. While he emphasized material progress, he did not ignore the spiritual enhancement.

In all these things, Swami Vivekananda drew inspiration from Ramakrishna, for Ramakrishna Paramahamsa mentioned that saintliness was not exclusive of patriotism or humanitarian service. He elevated spirituality to the lofty pedestal of social service, catholicity of outlook and compassion. No wonder, Romain Rolland has described Ramakrishna as the fulfilment of the spiritual aspirations of the millions of Indians during the past three thousand years. Service to man is the highest form of worship. All religions ultimately lead their sincere devotees to the same Godhead. Ramakrishna thus sowed the seeds of ‘Daridranarayana’—the sapling which was nurtured and watered under the tender care of Swami Vivekananda who proclaimed, ‘We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas.’

I had the privilege of participating in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in different parts of India and in Ceylon. They are the first one to reach

the people in times of need and necessity. Whether it is floods or drought, the members of this Holy Order are there to render succour to the suffering millions. It only shows the training that is imparted by the Ramakrishna Mission and is indeed true to the gospel of Ramakrishna whose one religion was all pervading humanism.

I must confess here I cannot consider myself to be religious in the accepted sense of the term. My only religion is humanism, for after all religion preach the same fundamental doctrines of Truth. Charity. Goodness, and Love and if we only realize this, the bickerings and antagonisms that prevail between those that claim to be the faithful followers of different religions will end. This is indeed the message of Swami Vivekananda also who fully realized that the true religion is to provide solace to the starving man. Swami Vivekananda has graphically portrayed his guru's fascinating personality : 'His face was distinguished by a child-like tenderness, profound humility and remarkable sweetness of expression. No one could look upon it unmoved,' Such was the radiance attained by Ramakrishna who adhered to his own dictum: Whatever the faith we profess or the method we adopt, if we do it with pure heart and devotion, we can attain Supreme Bliss. True devotees of any religion will honour the followers of any other religion with great humility. All religions will lead us to the Supreme Reality.

The best way in which we can celebrate the birthday anniversary of a saint and seer like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa is to recapture the essential unity of all religions and put down those ugly farces through persuasion and education. That alone will be the true homage that we can pay to Sri Ramakrishna. Let us resolve towards the realization of this objective.

ADMIRERS ACROSS THE SEAS

O Master, long have we waited in this far-off land on the western rim of the Western World by the shores of the Western Sea. Yea, long have we waited, dear Master.

Waiting, waiting, waiting—hungering and thirsting for Thee, though in this present life we knew not of Thee as Thou didst come again to the children of men.

But, at last, by devious ways and over weary paths, our wandering feet brought us to one of Thy devoted children who have come in Thy name to bring to the Western World Thy message of Love and Liberation, of Soul-Freedom and God-Consciousness....

And so,O Ramakrishna, Master,

We, thine other children, thy children of the West, beside thy children of the East, salute Thee !

On this, Thy natal day, with thankful and revernt hearts we come to lay at Thy dear feet the offerings of our love.

Nina MacDonald

Friedrich Max Muller

Many times the question has been asked of late, what is a *Mahatman,* and what is a *Sannyasin. Mahatman* is a very common Sanskrit word, and means literally great-souled, high-minded, noble. It is used as a complimentary term, much as we use noble or reverend; but it has been accepted also as technical term, applied to what are called *Sannyasins.ln* the ancient language of India, *Sannydsin* means one who has surrendered and laid down everything—that is, who has abandoned all worldly affections. 'He is to be known as a *Sannyasin,' we* read in the *Bhagavad-Gitd,* v.3, 'who does not hate and does not desire.' As the life of a Brahmana was, according to the laws of Manu, divided into four periods or *asramas*—that of a pupil, of a householder, of a hermit, and of an independent sage—those who had reached the fourth stage were called *Sannyasins,* a word difficult to render in English, but perfectly familiar to everybody in India.... It has been denied that there are any *Sannyasins* left in India, and in one sense this is true. If the scheme of life traced out by Manu was ever a reality, it has long since ceased to be so. ...[But] we meet at all times, both before and after the Buddhist reform, with men who had shaken off all social fetters; who had retired from their families and from society at large, lived by themselves in forests or in caves, abstained from all enjoyments, restricted their food and drink to the very utmost, and often underwent tortures which makes us creep when we read of them or see them represented in pictures and photographs. Such men were naturally surrounded by a halo of holiness, and they received the little they wanted from those who visited them or who profited by their teachings. Some of these saints—but not many—were scholars, and became teachers of their ancient lore. Some of course, were impostors and hypocrites, and have brought disgrace on the whole profession. But that there were *Sannyasins,* and that there are even now, who have really shaken off the fetters of passion, who have disciplined their body and subdued their mind to a perfectly marvellous extent, cannot be doubted. ... It is generally supposed that these same persons, these so-called *Sannyasins,* are also very learned and wise persons. ...[But] in the case of *Sannyasins* of the present generation we look in

vain either for great learning, even learning by heart, or for original thought and profound wisdom.... There was, for instance, Dayananda Sarasvati, who tried to introduce some reforms among the Brahmanas. He was a scholar in a certain sense. He actually published a commentary in Sanskrit on the Rig-Veda, and was able to speak Sanskrit with great fluency.

It is supposed that he was poisoned because his reforms threatened to become dangerous to the Brahmanas. But in all his writings there is nothing that could be quoted as original beyond his somewhat strange interpretations of words and whole passages of the Veda.

The late *Ramakrishna Paramahansa* was a far more specimen of a *Sannyasin.* He seems to have been, high-souled man, a real *Mahatman*, but a man of thought. Indian literature is full of wise saws and sayings, and by merely quoting them a man may easily gain a reputation for profound wisdom. But it was not so with *Ramakrishna.* He seems to have deeply meditated on the world from his solitary retreat. Whether he was a man of extensive reading is difficult to say, but he was certainly thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Vedanta philosophy. His utterances which have been published breathe the spirit of that philosophy; in fact are only intelligible as products of a Vedantic soil. And yet it is very curious to see how European thought, nay a certain European style, quite different from that of native thinkers, has found an entrance into the oracular sayings of this Indian saint....

In the extracts from Ramakrishna's teachings, some of which have been published by his pupils in their journal, the *Brahmavadin,* these ancient metaphors have for the first time been blended with European thought; and from all that we learn of his personal influence, this blending had a most powerful effect on the large audiences that came to listen to him. He has left a number of pupils behind who after his recent death are carrying on the work which he began, and who are trying to secure, not only in India, but in Europe also, a sympathetic interest in the ancient philosophy of India, which it deserves as fully as the philosophy of Plato or Kant...

It was not easy to obtain any trustworthy information about the circumstances of the *Mahatman's* life, a life singularly uneventful in his relations with the outer world, though full of stirring events in the inner world of his mind. ...

Protap Chandra Mozoomdar, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, and well known to many people in England, tells me of the extraordinary influence which the *Mahatman* exercised on Keshub Chunder Sen, on himself, and on a large number of highly educated men in Calcutta. A score of young men who were more closely attached to him have become ascetics after his death. They follow his teachings by giving up the enjoyment of wealth and carnal pleasure, living

together in a neighbouring *Math* (Monastery), and retiring at times to holy and solitary places all over India even as far as the Himalayan mountains. Besides these holy men, we are told that a great number of men with their families are ardently devoted to his cause. But what is most interesting is the fact that it was the *Mahatman* who exercised the greatest influence on Keshub Chunder Sen during the last phase of his career. It was a surprise to many of Keshub Chunder's friends and admirers to observe sudden change of the sober reformer into the mystic and ecstatic saint, that took place towards the end of his life. But although this later development of the New Dispensation, and more particularly the doctrine of the motherhood of God may have alienated many of Keshub Chunder Sen's European friends, it seems to have considerably increased his popularity with Hindu Society. At all events we are now enabled to understand the hidden influences which caused so sudden a change, and produced so marked a deviation in the career of the famous founder of the Brahmo Samaj, which has sometimes been ascribed to the breakdown of an overexcited brain.

It is different with a man like Ramakrishna. He never moved in the world, or was a man of the world, even in the sense in which Keshub Chunder Sen was. He seems from the very first to have practised that very severe kind of asceticism (yoga) which is intended to produce trances *(samddhi)* and ecstatic utterances. We cannot quite understand them, but in the case of our *Mahatman* we cannot doubt their reality, and can only stand by and wonder, particularly when so much that seems to us the outcome of a broken frame of body and overwrought state of mind, contains nevertheless so much that is true and wise and beautiful....

The state of [his] religious exaltation...has been witnessed again and again by serious observers of exceptional psychic states. It is in its essence some thing like our talking in sleep, only that with a mind saturated with religious thoughts and with the sublimest ideas of goodness and purity the result is what we find in the case of Ramakrishna, no mere senseless hypnotic jabbering, but a spontaneous outburst of profound wisdom clothed in beautiful, poetical language. His mind seems like a kaleidoscope of pearls, diamonds, and sapphires shaken together at random but always producing precious thoughts in regular, beautiful outlines. To our ears, no doubt, much of his teaching and preaching sounds strange, but not to Oriental ears, or to ears accustomed to the perfervid poetry of the East. Everything seems to become purified in his mind. Nothing, I believe, is so hideous as the popular worship of Kali in India. To Ramakrishna all that is repulsive in her character is, as it were, non-existent, and there remains but the motherhood of the goddess. Her adoration with him is a childlike, whole-souled, rapturous self-consecration to the motherhood of God, as represented by

the power and influence of woman. Woman in her natural material character had long been renounced by the saint. He had a wife, but never associated with her. ‘Woman’, He said, ‘fascinates and keeps the world from the love of God.’ For long years he made the utmost efforts to be delivered from the influence of woman. His heart-rending supplications and prayers for such deliverance, sometimes uttered aloud in his retreat on the riverside brought crowds of people, who bitterly cried when he cried, and could not help blessing him and wishing him success with their whole hearts. And he succeeded, so that his mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kali, made him recognize every woman as her incarnation, and honour each member of the other sex, whether young or old, as his mother. In one of his prayers he exclaims: ‘O Mother Divine, I want no honour from man, I want no pleasure of the flesh; only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna. Mother, I am without *bhakti* (devotion), without yoga (concentration); I am poor and friendless. I want no one’s praise, only let my mind always dwell in the lotus of Thy feet.’ But what is the most extraordinary of all, his religion was not confined to the worship of Hindu deities and the purification of Hindu customs. For long days he subjected himself to various kinds of discipline to realize—the Mohammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the Koran. For Christ his reverence was deep and genuine. He bowed his head at the name of Jesus, honoured the doctrine of his sonship, and once or twice attended Christian places of worship. He declared that each form of worship was to him a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion; he showed, in fact, how it was possible to unify all the religions of the world by seeing only what is good in every one of them, and showing sincere reverence to every one who has suffered for the truth, for their faith in God, and for their love of men. He seems to have left nothing in writing, but his sayings live in the memory of his friends. He would not be a master or the founder of a new set. ‘I float a frail half-sunk log of wood through the stream of the troublous world. If men come to hold by me to save their lives, the result will be that they will drown me without being able to save themselves. Beware of Gurus!’

I am quite aware that some of his sayings may sound strange to our ears, nay even offensive. Thus the conception of the Deity as the Divine Mother is apt to startle us, but we can understand what Ramakrishna really meant by it, when we read his saying:

‘Why does the God-lover find such pleasure in addressing the Deity as Mother? Because the child is more free with its mother, and consequently she is dearer to the child than anyone else.’

How deep Ramakrishna has seen into the mysteries of knowledge and love of God, we see from the next saying :

‘Knowledge and love of God are ultimately one and the same. There is no difference between pure knowledge and pure love.’

The following utterances also show the exalted nature of his faith:

‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, that he who yearns for God, finds Him.’

‘He who has faith has all, and he who wants faith wants all.’

‘So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get Divine illumination. Forget all the worldly knowledge that thou hast acquired and become as ignorant about it as a child, and then thou wilt get the knowledge of the True.’

‘Where does the strength of an aspirant lie? It is in his tears. As a mother gives her consent to fulfil the desire of her importunately weeping child, so God vouchsafes to His weeping son whatever he is crying for.’

‘As a lamp does not burn without oil, so a man cannot live without God.’

‘God is in all men, but all men are not in God : that is the reason why they suffer.’

From such sayings we learn that though the real presence of the Divine in nature and in the human soul was nowhere felt so strongly and so universally as in India, and though the fervent love of God, nay the sense of complete absorption in the Godhead, has nowhere found a stronger and more eloquent expression than in the utterances of Ramakrishna, yet he perfectly knew the barriers that separate divine and human nature.

If we remember that these utterances of Ramakrishna reveal to us not only his own thoughts, but the faith and nope of millions of human beings, we may indeed feel hopeful about the future of that country. The consciousness of the Divine in man is there, and is shared by all, even by those who seem to worship idols. This constant sense of the presence of God is indeed the common ground on which we may hope that in time not too distant the great temple of the future will be erected, in which Hindus and non-Hindus may join hands and hearts in worshipping the same Supreme Spirit—who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

THE BIRTH OF RAMAKRISHNA

Christopher Isherwood

Soon after the move to Kamarpukur, Khudiram had the first of a series of spiritual experiences which were to be granted to him and to his wife Chandra

during the years that followed. Since such experiences, in all their variety, are to be a recurring theme in this story, I will make some general remarks about them now.

When we use the word ‘experience’ in its primary sense, we mean—to quote the dictionary—’the process or fact of personally observing, encountering, or undergoing something’. That is to say, experience is valued because it is personal; being contrasted favourably with hearsay or the information got from newspapers and books. Experiences are held to be more or less important according to the intensity of their effect on the experiences

These two factors—the personal nature of experience and its measurement by intensity—are most significant when we come to consider the kind of experience called spiritual.

If someone tells me about an experience he has had in the world of ordinary sense-perception, I shall usually be able to decide whether he is speaking the truth or lying. I can do this, because I can almost always relate the experience he describes to similar experiences of my own. And so his experience is of value to me. But if someone tells me about an experience in the spiritual world. I shall probably be in doubt, because I have no similar experiences to which 1 can relate his. Unless, for other reasons, I have become convinced that this person will never lie to me. his experience will therefore be of no value to me. Many of my readers will know that sense of sad frustration with which one listens to some spiritual testimony one longs to believe in but can’t, because ihe witness is so obviously dishonest. It is human nature to pretend to know a little more than you really do.

But, alas, how many pupils have lost faith, because they caught their teacher exaggerating!

So, a little spiritual experience of your own is of more value to you than all the recorded experiences of the greatest saints. And, indeed, without that minimum of personal experience, you cannot possibly begin to guess at the magnitude of theirs.

A spiritual experience can only be properly judged by its intensity; the intensity, that is, of its after effect on the experiences. It is no use trying to decide whether or not a certain experience was spiritual by analysing its cirumstances; these may have been produced by some quite other kind of cause, such as sickness or the use of certain drugs. One should not ask oneself, ‘Was my experience an hallucination or not?’ But rather, ‘What has my experience left with me, now that it is over?’ A true spiritual experience, even one of lesser intensity, must at least slightly affect the experiencer for the rest of his life.

But now I must try to answer the question: What *is* a spiritual experience?

The difficulty here is that the average reader's mind is apt to be confused by various ill-defined terms he has met with in books—such as vision, trance, psychic phenomenon, revelation, spirit-message, etc. Even such an authority as *Roget's Thesaurus* gives 'vision' as a synonym for 'hallucination'! As the result of these vague definitions, the reader gradually comes to rely on Matter as the only reality and to think of Spirit as a shadowy and dangerous hinterland of deceptions and illusions. True, the modern physicist keeps telling him that Matter itself is a deception; the table is utterly unlike the thing we think; we see and feel. But even this warning does nothing to alter his concept of Spirit. For, according to his mental filing system; what the physicist tells him about Matter is 'science', but what the clergyman tells him about Spirit is 'religion"; and the findings of science and religion can never, he thinks, be related to each other.

But the Hindu religious philosophers of thousands of years ago were much more truly scientific in their outlook than most of us are today, and they drew no such crude dividing-line between Matter and Spirit. They explained the evolution of the universe as a projection of a series of coverings around the Reality which is Brahman. Brahman itself is pure undifferentiated consciousness; but each of these coverings represents a stage in progressive differentiation, by which the One becomes seemingly many.

This evolutionary process is said to be motivated by Isvara. Isvara is what most of us mean when we say 'God'—that is, God with attributes; loving, merciful, and just. Brahman, being the Absolute, is beyond all attributes and all action. It is Isvara. Brahman united with its power, who creates a universe, sustains it, and in due course dissolves it again—tor the process of evolution and involution is said to operate in an eternal cycle. To say that Isvara is the creator is not to imply a dualism. For the power of Brahman can no more be separated from Brahman than the heat of fire can be separated from fire itself.

The power of Brahman is the basis of all mind and matter. It is called Prakrti or Maya; the terms are interchangeable, (Maya is popularly supposed to mean 'illusion', but this is a loose and misleading translation. Maya (or Prakrti) can only be called illusory in a relative sense, namely, that the universe which is made of it is impermanent and other than Brahman, the Reality.)

According to Hindu philosophy, the evolutionary sequence is as follows. Prakrti projects *mahat,* the basis of the individual intelligence. *Mahat* projects *buddhi,* the faculty by which the nature of objects is distinguished and their functions are classified. *Buddhi* projects *ahankara,* the ego-sense. *Ahankara* projects the powers of perception and also the objects of perception—the subtle and gross elements, and the subtle and gross faculties with which we perceive them.

These coverings are therefore coverings of ignorance; they hide Brahman from us. The material universe, which is known to our physical senses, is the grossest manifestation of this ignorance, since it is the most outward covering, farthest from Brahman.

Matter and Spirit are not divided; they are interrelated.

The former is evolved from the latter, and the difference between them is only one of degree. When the meditative mind turns in upon itself, following a line of *involution* in its attempt to reach Brahman, it becomes aware of this truth. Beneath the gross elements of the material world, it encounters the subtle elements which are their essences. This is what is called the psychic world. Within the psychic world, we possess subtle bodies which are the essences of our gross bodies and exercise subtle senses which are the essences of our gross senses. The psychic world exists superimposed upon the material world; but it does not normally make itself apparent to us or concern itself with our doings. It is, as you might say in the jargon of nowadays, on a different wave length.

Our experience of the material world is obtained only while we are awake. Our experience of the psychic world may be obtained while we are awake or dreaming, and it may be produced by means of concentration or austerities or drugs. Beyond the material and the psychic worlds, the mind enters the world of spiritual experience. Such experience differs altogether from psychic experience. It can be recognized by its lasting effect upon the experiencer; psychic visions cannot transform a man’s nature, no matter how startling and vivid they may be. Unlike psychic visions, spiritual visions are not generally variable. If you have a vision of Jesus, for example, he will appear to you just as he has appeared to other devotees; he will not necessarily resemble any picture of his you have made for yourself in your imagination. A psychic experience may cause you no particular emotion, or it may depress or terrify you; a spiritual experience will always be accompanied by great joy. During a spiritual vision, the experiencer loses awareness of his material surroundings; they become merged in light. During a psychic vision, the experiencer often remains fully aware of his material surroundings; and. indeed, the apparition itself is apt to appear in such a natural manner that it is at first mistaken for an ordinary human being or animal.

The highest spiritual experiences can only be known in that state of consciousness which in Sanskrit is called *nirvikalpa samadhi. Samadhi* is a state quite other than that of waking, dreaming, or dreamless sleep; it has been described as superconsciousness. In *samadhi,* a man knows his absolute identity with the Atman. which is his real nature. The first of Khudiram’s visions took place in the following manner.

One day, Khudiram had lo go to a neighbouring village. On the way home, he

felt tired and stopped to rest in the shade of a tree. It was a quiet place, and a soft breeze was blowing; he became relaxed in body and mind, lay down, and fell asleep.

Spiritual visions which come to us in sleep are not like ordinary dreams; they can be better described as visitations, for they are much more vivid and memorable than the encounters of our waking life. In this vision, Khudiram saw Sri Rama, his chosen deity, in the form of a celestial boy whose body was green like a blade of young grass. ‘I’ve been there a long time,’ the boy said, pointing to a particular spot in the middle distance. ‘I had nothing to eat and no one to look after me. Take me back to your house. I want very much to be served by you.’ At this. Khudiram was greatly moved: he prostrated again and again before the boy. ‘Oh, my Lord,’ he said. “I am a poor man. and my devotion is weak. How could I possibly serve you in my hut? And if my service is unworthy of you. I shall lose your grace. Why do you make such a hard demand of me?’ But the boy reassured Khudiram, saying graciously: ‘Don’t be afraid. I shan’t blame you for anything that’s lacking. Take me with you.’ Khudiram burst into tears of joy, and woke.

Looking around him. he now recognized the very spot which Sri Rama had indicated in the vision. And there he saw a stone lying, which he knew to be a sacred salagrama stone. Beside this stone, as if guarding it, a cobra was reared on its coils with hood expanded threateningly.

The salagrama is a kind of stone, often about the size and shape of a plum; it has one or more holes in it and bears certain markings. Salagramas are natural formations, and most of them are found in the River Gandaki, a tributary of the Ganga. It was not, however, so very surprising that Khudiram found this one in a paddy-field in Bengal; for the stones are regarded as emblems of Visnu, and a wandering holy rnan might well carry one around with him to worship.

Khudiram was still in the exalted mood of his vision. He hurried over to the stone without a thought of physical tear; and, indeed, by the time he had reached it. the cobra had disappeared into its hole. Khudiram brought the stone back home with him. performed the prescribed ritual of dedication, and set in up in the household shrine to be worshipped daily. It was thus that he received the boy of his vision as an honoured family guest.

Khudiram had not exaggerated when he warned the boy that he would be poorly entertained. There were days when the household had nothing to eat. But. when this happened. Khudiram would comfort his wife Chandra, saying, ‘Never mind—if Lord Rama chooses to fast, why shouldn’t we?’And it was not long before their situation improved, thanks to the richness of the land Sukhlal had given them. It throve, despite Khudiram’s unworldliness and his preoccupation

with ritual worship. When Khudiram went to bathe in the tank, the villagers stayed out of the water, as a sign of their respect. And while Khudiram was admired. Chandra was loved, because she was so generous and so ready with her sympathy for all who were in trouble.

Years later Ramakrishna said of his parents: ‘My mother was the soul of honesty and sincerity. She didn’t know much about the ways of the world, and was incapable of concealment; she said whatever was in her mind. My father ... spent most of his time in worship and meditation, and telling his beads. Every day, while he was praying ... his chest swelled and shone with a divine radiance, and tears rolled down his cheeks. In his spare time, when he wasn’t engaged in worship, he would make garlands for Sri Rama.... The villagers respected him as a sage.’

It has been already mentioned that when Khudiram and Chandra moved to Kamarpukur they had two children. These were a son, Ramkumar born in 1805 and a daughter, Katyayani, born in 1810. Twelve years after the arrival of the family in Kamarpukur, a second son Rameswar was born.

These, with a second daughter. Sarvamangala, born in 1839, were to be Ramakrishna’s brothers and sisters. But, for the benefit of those readers who find it difficult to keep many names distinct in their minds, I will say at once that only one, the elder brother Ramkumar, was to play any considerable part in Ramakrishna’s adult life.

No close relative of such a figure as Ramakrishna can be without spiritual greatness. But, even in this famify, Ramkumar was outstanding. He combined his father’s deep faith with practical ability in worldly affairs ; and as he grew to manhood, he became their bread-winner. He was an excellent Sanskrit scholar, and had mastered the scriptures so thoroughly that he was able to earn a living by giving advice to those who wanted some doctrinal point settled for them. He had also learned how to perform certain rites which are designed to ward off sickness and other misfortunes. In.the course of his spiritual disciplines, he had suddenly developed psychic powers; he was able to foresee coming events and detect latent diseases in apparently healthy people. These powers he demonstrated most dramatically on many occasions.

Once, for example, when Ramkumar was visiting Calcutta on some business, he went to bathe in the Ganga. While he was doing so, a rich man arrived with his family at the bathing-ghat. Since bathing in the Ganga is a religious rite rather than a mere act of hygiene, it is performed even by those who could wash much more comfortably in their own homes. And, in fact, the wife of this rich man was trying to preserve some of her domestic privacy; for she was sitting in a

curtained palanquin which her servants carried right down into the water, so that she could take her bath inside it. Being a country boy accustomed to the open unashamed ways of village life, Ramkumar had never seen anyone bathing in this manner. As he looked in astonishment at the palanquin, he caught a glimpse of the lady's beautiful face between the curtains. Instantly, in a flash of his psychic insight, he knew that she would be dead by the next day. The knowledge overwhelmed him with sadness—so much so that he involuntarily murmured to himself : 'Such precautions about washing this body in private today—and tomorrow they'll be bringing it back to the river, a corpse, for everyone to see!'

Most unfortunately, the lady's husband overheard Ramkumar's words. Terribly shocked and angry, he resolved to punish this young prophet of evil just as soon as his prophecy had been proved false. So. with outward politeness he insisted that Ramkumar should come to their home with them. But that night the seemingly healthy wife fell suddenly sick and died.

Ramkumar also made a prophecy about his own wife, namely, that she would die in her first childbirth. To his great relief, his wife remained childless for many years. But she did die, at the age of thirty-five, in 1849 in giving birth to a son named Akshay, who will appear later in this story.

Like all pious Hindus. Khudiram loved to go on pilgrimages. In 1824. he travelled on foot all the way to the shrines of Southern India, a journey which took a whole year. Again, in 1835, he set out for Gaya, in Bihar. At this time, Khudiram was sixty years old; but he was still slender and strong, and the hardships of the road meant nothing to him.

Gaya is doubly holy. The city itself is sacred to Visnu, the preserver of the universe and the second deity in the Hindu trinity, with Brahma the creator and Siva the dissolver. (Actually, this trinity personifies the three functions of Isvara: creation, preservation, dissolution.) And a few miies outside Gaya is the traditional site of the pipal tree beneath which the Buddha meditated and attained enlightenment.

Khudiram stayed about a month at Gaya, worshipping at the many shrines in the surrounding hills and plains. He reserved for the last the most sacred shrine of all; the main temple which contains the footprint of Visnu. Here he made the offerings of boiled rice balls and powdered wheat or barley, which are called pindas. Such offerings are regarded as tokens of reverence for one's ancestors.

That night, in sleep, he had another spiritual vision. He saw himself back in the Visnu temple, making the offering, just as he had done that day. All around him were his ancestors, accepting his offering and blessing him. Then he became aware that these ancestors were themselves worshipping the Lord, who was

enthroned in their midst. The Lord looked affectionately at Khudiram, beckoned to him to approach, and said: “Khudiram, your great devotion has made me very happy. The time has come tor me to be born once again on earth. I shall be born as your son.’

Again, as in his earlier vision, Khudiram protested. The honour was too great. He was poor and unworthy. He begged to be excused from accepting it. But the Lord refused to accept his excuses. ‘Don’t be afraid, Khudiram’. he said. ‘Whatever you give me to eat, I shall enjoy.’

When Khudiram awoke, he felt certain that this was a divine revelation, and that the Lord of the Universe was actually about to be born into his household. He said nothing about his vision to anyone, left Gaya a few days later, and was back in Kamarpukur before the end of April.

On his return, he found Chandra in a strange radiant mood of love. Her concern for her neighbours was such that she could not take her meal until she was sure that all of them had eaten. If anyone had not, she wanted to share her own portion of food with him. She had the same guileless, trustful altitude toward all. It seemed that she could no longer think of anybody as being a stranger to her.

With the simplicity of a child, Chandra told Khudiram about the amazing experiences she had had, during his absence. ‘One night, I dreamed that you had come home. The first thing I knew, you were holding me in your arms. I felt so glad! But then I saw your face—and it wasn’t you. It wasn’t a human face. It shone, like the face of a god. I screamed and struggled to get free: and then I woke up with a great start, and I was alone in bed, shivering all over with fright! So then, after a moment, I asked myself: “Does a god ever appear to a human being in this way?” So I decided it couldn’t have been a god, but some wicked man who’d come into the room for an evil purpose. So I got up and lighted the lamp, but there was nobody there, and the door was still bolted from the inside. All the rest of that night, I was afraid to go back to steep. As soon as it was morning, I sent for Dhani and Prasanna and told them everything; and I asked them: “Do you think a man really came into my room? I have no quarrel with anyone in the village.” But both of them laughed at me and scolded me. “You silly woman!” they said, “Has old age softened your brain? Better not tell anyone else about that dream of yours, or you’ll start a scandal.” So then I decided that it was only just a dream and that I wouldn’t speak of it again except to you, my husband.’

Chandra had another experience to describe to Khudiram, which was even more extraordinary. A few days after the night of her dream—in broad daylight —she had been gossiping with this same friend Dhani, who was the daughter of

a neighbouring blacksmith. The two women were standing before a temple of Siva—it is actually a small domed shrine, only large enough to contain half a dozen worshippers, right opposite Khudiram's home. The temple is still there today.

'All of a sudden,' Chandra told Khudiram, 'I saw that the holy image of Lord Siva inside the shrine was alive! It began to send forth waves of the most beautiful light. Slowly at first, then quicker and quicker. They filled up the inside of the temple, and then they came pouring out—it was like one of those huge floodwaves in the river—right toward me! I was going to tell Dhani; but then the waves washed over me and swallowed me up. and I fell that marvellous light enter into my body. I fell down on the ground, unconscious. When I came to myself, I told Dhani what had happened. But she didn't believe me; she said I'd had an epileptic fit. That can't be so. because, since then. I've been full of joy. and my health is better than ever. Only—I feel that light is still inside me; and I believe that I'm with a child.'

Khudiram now told his wife about his vision at Gaya. and assured her that her own visions were no fancies, but revelations of the great grace which they were soon to receive. So the two rejoiced together. And, as the months passed, it became known to everyone in Kamarpukur that Chandra was indeed pregnant, at the age of forty-five. It was noticed that this pregnancy made her remarkably beautiful; and the neighbours shook their heads, taking this beauty for a sign that she was fated to die in giving birth to her child.

Meanwhile, Chandra continued to have visions, with increasing frequency. Almost daily, the gods and goddesses appeared to her, or she heard their voices around her, and the tinkle of their anklets, or smelled their subtle perfumes. A great change had come over Chandra since her visions began. She no longer felt any awe of the gods. She loved them so much that they seemed closer to her than her own sons and daughter, and her attitude to them was now that of a mother. This was the tone in which she used to talk about them to Khudiram: Today. I saw a god riding on the back of a swan, I was startled, at first; then I felt sorry for him, because his face was quite red from sun-burn. So I called to him and I said: 'Dear little god. riding on your swan, your face looks burned by the sun. There's some cool rice in the house; I cooked it yesterday. Do come and eat a little, and refresh yourself before you go on.' He heard me and he smiled, But then he faded away, and I didn't see him any more.'

These visions have been received with disbelief even by some of Ramakrishna's greatest admirers in the West. Remain Rolland dismisses them with an indulgent smile as charming fables. Max Miiller regards them as products of what he calls the Dialogic Process: 'the irrepressible miracu-lizing

tendencies of devoted disciples.

Now. the creation of legends is a natural mark of human reverence for what one feels to be greater than oneself. No reasonable person reveres the Buddha any less, because his biography has been overdecorated with marvels. But the case of Khudiram and Chandra is totally different; and I think it only fair to point this out.

Legends may and perhaps must, accumulate with the passing of generations, as one well-intentioned historian after another repeats a story with his own additions. But legends require time to grow. We are not dealing with legends here. We are dealing either with the truth—or with lies. It is important not to mince words, out of politeness. In this case, if a lie was told, it was told by those directly concerned in the situation at issue. It was told with deliberate intent. It was told by individuals who believed, or said they believed, that lying is the filthiest kind of impurity and the grossest obstacle to one's spiritual progress. This is the most serious accusation we can make against them. Very well, let us make it.

Max Muller is too tactful to speak bluntly, but he implies that Ramakrishna's disciples—including their chief spokesman, Vivekananda. whom Max Muller knew personally— were responsible for thus falsifying the record fifty years later, after Ramakrishna's death. Their motive for doing this would presumably have been to prove that Ramakrishna was conceived in a supernatural manner and was therefore a divine incarnation, like Jesus of Nazareth. When we meet Vivekananda in the latter part of this story, we shall find him a highly sceptical young man with a western-agnostic education in Calcutta, who refused utterly to believe in the supernormal until he had, so to speak, banged his head against it. And even when Vivekananda's disbelief had been modified by personal experience, even when he had become one of Ramakrishna's most passionate devotees, he still discouraged blind faith in others, still urged everyone to find out the truth for himself. And, over and over again, he asserted that it really did not matter whether you believed that Ramakrishna was a divine incarnation or not! How can we accuse such men of lying?

Was Chandra iying? It seems impossible to doubt that she at least believed she saw the visions. At the time Saradananda wrote his book, he talked to villagers of Kamarpukur who had heard the story of the visions from Chandra herself. And these witnesses are reliable, just because, as they admitted, they did not take her seriously. Bengal country-people of those days were, in fact, not nearly so credulous as they are popularly supposed to have been! Were Chandra and Khudiram insane, then? If there is one general characteristic of the many kinds of mental disease, it would seem to be an intense preoccupation with oneself, to

the exclusion of the outside world. An odd sort of insanity, this, which fills its victims with love for everybody and makes them beloved by all who know them!

When all has been said, those who are determined not to believe will find excuses for their disbelief. They will point to the fact that reproduction without fertilization does occasionally take place in nature, even among mammals. They will show that visions may arise from all sorts of physiological and psychological causes. But this is merely to evade the important question: Did Khudiram and Chandra have what we may describe as true spiritual experience? I have already suggested, at the beginning of this chapter, that the only proper test of such experience is to study its aftereffects upon the experiencer. This, in the case of Khudiram and Chandra, we have just done. And now I can only leave each of my readers to answer the question for himself.

According to Hindu religious custom, the room in which a delivery takes place becomes ritually unclean for ten days thereafter; anyone who enters it during this period must wash himself after leaving. The practical value of this restriction is to discourage outsiders from coming in and fussing around the baby at a time when it is very liable to infection.

Most families build a special lying-in hut, or set aside a room for this purpose which is apart from the main building. Khudiram's home consisted of four rooms only: the shrine-room dedicated to Sri Rama, Khudiram's bedroom, Ramkumar's bedroom, and a living room. In the yard opposite the main hut. there was a roughly-made shed of bamboo and thatch which was the kitchen. At right angles to this was another thatched shed. It was here that Chandra was to bear her child.

(The sheds have gone, now; and a memorial shrine has been built on the site of the second shed. Khudiram's hut still stands.)

Inside the second shed were a fire-place for boiling paddy and a husking-machinc, a primitive apparatus for pounding the boiled paddy until the rice is disengaged from its husk. Two people are needed to work this machine; one of them makes the husking-hammer rise and fall by moving with his foot a lever to which the hammer is attached, the other keeps feeding fresh paddy into the hole beneath the hammer. In later years, Ramakrishna was to take the husking-machine as one of the many homely illustrations he used in his teaching: 'How are you to live in the world and yet be mindful of God?

'Take an example from the housewife. She's busy in so many ways at once! With one hand she pushes the paddy into the mortar of the husking-machine. with the other she suckles her child; and meanwhile she's bargaining with a neighbour. But. all the time, her mind is fixed on a single idea—not to let the

hammer of the husking-machine fall on her hand and bruise it. So. no matter what your worldly duties are. keep your mind fixed on Him.'

Chandra's labour pains began shortly before dawn, on February 18. 1836. The delivery was easy. Chandra had barely lime to reach the shed, with Dhani's assistance, before the child was born.

Dhani later described a strange circumstance of the birth. Having done what was needful for Chandra. she turned to the baby and found that he had somehow rolled across the floor. He was lying among the ashes of the fire-place, still bloody and unwashed. without uttering a sound. As Dhani took him up and washed him, she marvelled at his beauty and size: he might well, she said, have been a child six months old.

Mindful of his vision after visiting the Visnu temple at Gaya. Khudiram decided to call this third son of his Gadadhar—for Gadadhar, meaning 'Bearer of the Mace—is one of the epithets applied to Sri Visnu. It was as Gadadhar that the boy grew into adolescence. Not until he was a young man at Dakshineswar was he first given the name by which the world was later to know him: Ramakrishna.

JIVA IS SHIVA

Romain Rolland

It is related that when Sri Ramakrishna. in the first days following his great ecstasy in the bosom of identity—and this was after Totapuri's departure—allowed his consciousness to return to earth, he saw two boat-men quarelling in hatred. And because of this hatred, as from a wound, his heart was bleeding; and he screamed; the sufferings of the universe were torturing him. For all the pains of the world were imprinting themselves into the tender flesh of his reawakening consciousness.

What would he have felt, what would he have suffered, in these days of the present world, when the whole humanity seems given up to hatred, when war rages or smoulders everywhere under the ashes, between nations, between races, between classes!

But the mighty Swan (Paramahamsa) had wings that enabled him to hover above life. If he did not try to detach himself from life, as so many mystics do, to avoid its sufferings, it is because universal love, which was to him a second sight, revealed to him, in a flash, in the presence of human misery, that "Jiva is Siva"—that the living being is God—that whoever loves God must unite himself with Him in sufferings, in misery, even in errors and excesses, in the terrible

aspect of human nature.

We all know that he took away his great disciple Vivekananda from the fascination of the fathomless God in order to force him into the service of men. And that is what you, following his example, have been able to accomplish, you whose monastic Ramakrishna Mission, like your emblem, the swan, covers the unhappy with its wings and helps them as brothers. You have carried out the pregnant saying of your Master : “If *you want peace of mind, serve others. ... If you wish to find God, serve man! ...*”

The enfeeblement and the ruin of so many religions lies in the fact that they have forgotten this saying. They have forgotten man. And man, in his turn, forgets them. He has learned to help himself without God—(as one of our European artists, and one of the most religious too. Beethoven, proclaimed when he said to those who called upon God for help : “O man. help thyself! ...”). He has even learnt to help himself against God—whom he identifies with those Churches, which, too often, stand against the oppressed masses as the courtesans or the handmaids of power. Has not the Catholic Church, the most powerful of these Churches in Europe, laid down the cynical rule of ranging itself on the side of any power that has victory, provided only that it respects the church privileges? Thus they associate themselves with the injustice set up by force. The churches should not then wonder that oppressed peoples in their revolt against unjust force, associate the former with the force from which they want to liberate themselves: Although not conscious of it, those seething peoples, even when they believe themselves to be without God or against God, are nevertheless, to be regarded as the living God, while in their fight for justice, in their ascent towards light, *“Jiva is Siva.”* ... And we ought to recognize this truth.

We live in a world turned upside down. And, indeed, the masses have always been downtrodden. But they had not, up to this day. the knowledge and the consciousness of that universal oppression, which has been revealed to them by the increased means of communications and the progress of international solidarity. We may no longer remain indifferent to those peoples who are today making a desperate effort to break their chains and set up a more equitable and more human order. Any of this is no longer permissible especially to us, your friends in the Occident who do not happen to possess like you the faith in survivals (lives after death). Time is pressing us. The wave of men’s sufferings is drowning us like a tide. We must fly to their help. Even if we had before us the eternity of “lives after death,” each one of these lives is a “living thing” which

has its own duties and its laws corresponding to the particular time of its birth and the human surroundings in which it has its course. Each single life is neither permitted to leave undone all the present good it is capable of doing, nor to decline to fight, with its total might of today, all the iniquities of the time being. The Ramakrishnite of the West that I am does not admit that for one's own salvation, one should withdraw from action, when it is urgent to act in order to help the oppressed. I remember the holy anger of the great disciple when he exclaimed to one of his brethern who was endeavouring to avoid the tragedy of the present world in order to betake himself to the sweetness of divine contemplation. *"Put off to the next life the reading of the Vedanta, the practice of meditation! Let this body of today be consecrated to the service of others!"* And this immortal prayer :

"*Would that I could be born and reborn again and suffer a thousand miseries, provided I might adore and serve the only God that exists, the sumlotal of all souls, and, above all, my God the evil-doers, my Cod the unfortunates, my God the poor of all races!*"

Oh! what an error, too common among religious God-lovers, to think that their love diminishes and that their soul is lowered in value on account of intercourse with men. On the contrary, it expands and is revivified because of embracing the whole and entire Being, the innumerable Being; with its million forms ever in motion, ever advancing as they are, like a Ganges.

Doing thus, you will serve, by being wedded to it, each one of the forms of the living God;—but without ever losing the feeling and the very presence of the all-powerful Unity, wherein these conflicting million forms find harmony. It is not doing a wrong to the unchanging Divine Peace that hovers over the storms of Existence, if one holds out a hand to those who struggle in those storms. Vivekananda did not cease repeating to his Sannyasis that they had taken two vows, and that, if the first was *"to realize the truth,"* the second was *"to help the world" .... "To help men to stand erect, by themselves . . ."*—Let us help them, then, those peoples who, *"by themselves and alone,"* heroically try *"to stand erect!"* Let us co-operate in their effortsl Even in this manner it will be possible for us afterwards to co-operate in the harmony of warring forces.

You are the bearers, in this storm-tossed world, of the Supreme Harmony, wherein must blend and melt away all combats and opposite efforts. It is your proper role, your privilege, and your sacred duty to radiate peace, order and unity in the chaos in which peoples are blindly at odds with one another. Be, like Sri Ramakrishna, the wide-spreading banyan tree in whose shade thousands of souls, weary and wounded in the fight, come for shelter and peace. Pour on them

the balm of reconciliation, which is the fruit of reason, no less than of love ! We know well that the most wicked are but misguided. They know not what they do. The greatest leader of the liberated peoples, Lenin of the U.S.S.R., victim of a dastardly outrage, calmed the vengeance of his friends by telling them with his intelligent smile : *"What's to be done! Every one acts according to his knowledge."*

The misfortune of the world comes from its want of knowledge. Let us then teach it to know. Let us enlighten it, by preventing it from doing harm—from harming itself ! For he who harms his neighbour, does not know that it is himself whom he is harming. Another of our great men of Europe, the inspired poet Victor Hugo, speaking of those who wanted to harm him, uttered these beautiful words, so allied to the wisdom of India :

"Oh ! fool, who thinkest that thou art not I !..."

It is the Supreme miracle of Ramakrishna that in him "thou" is "1", that the whole world is not only reflected, but incarnate in a man's heart—that God is realized on earth, in his universality and his multiplicity.... *"Jiva is Siva."*...

And Ramakrishna works in him—in us—this divine Identity.

Aldous Huxley

'The further you go towards the East,' Sri Ramakrishna was fond of saying, 'the further you go away from the West.' This is one of those apparently childish remarks, which we meet with so often among the writings and recorded sayings of religious teachers. But it is an apparent childishness that masks a real profundity. Within this absurd little tautology there lies, in a state of living, seminal latency, a whole metaphysic, a complete programme of action. It is, of course, the same philosophy and the same way of life as were referred to by Jesus in those sayings about the impossibility of serving two masters, and the necessity of seeking first the kingdom of God and waiting for all the rest to be added. Egoism and alter-egoism (or the idolatrous service of individuals, groups, and causes with which we identify ourselves so that their success flatters our own ego) cut us off from the knowledge and experience of reality....

Egoism and alter-egoism advise us to remain firmly ensconced in the West, looking after our own human affairs. But if we do this, our affairs will end by going to pot.... Whereas if we ignore the counsels of egoism and alter-egoism, and resolutely march toward the divine East, we shall create for ourselves the possibility of receiving the grace of enlightenment and, at the same time, we shall find that existence in our physical, Western home is a great deal more satisfactory than it was when we devoted our attention primarily to the

improvement of our human lot.

Amaury De Reincourt

Can a connection between the scientific and mystical frames of reference be established over and beyond a certain metaphysical parallelism? The answer lies perhaps in the fact that Indian mysticism, at least as far as its leading representatives are concerned, has evolved as much in the past hundred years as the science of physics itself, in a direction that points toward an inevitable convergence of the two. From its modern awakening with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, Eastern mysticism has begun to adapt its revelations to the entirely different cultural framework provided by science and technology, without in any way sacrificing what is valid in its traditional understanding of the phenomenon itself. The true departure occurred with the life and writings of Sri Aurobindo who began to wield India's traditional metaphysics to the concept of a modified and purposeful Evolution —quite a departure for the offspring of a culture that had consistently ignored the spiritual significance of time and history.

Arnold Joseph Toynbee

Sri Ramakrishna's message was unique in being expressed in action. The message itself was the perennial message of Hinduism.... In the Hindu view, each of the higher religions is a true vision and a right way, and all of them alike are indispensable to mankind, because each gives a different glimpse of the same truth, and each leads by a different route to the same goal of human endeavours. Each, therefore, has a special spiritual value of its own which is not to be found in any of the others.

To know this is good, but it is not enough. Religion is not just a matter for study ; it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived, and this is the field in which Sri Ramakrishna manifested his uniqueness. He practised successively almost every form of Indian religion and philosophy, and he went on to practise Islam and Christianity as well. His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere. His devotion to God in the personal form of the Great Mother did not prevent him from attaining the state of 'contentless consciousness'—an absolute union with absolute spiritual Reality.

Sri Ramakrishna made his appearance and delivered his message at the time

and the place at which he and his message were needed. This message could hardly have been delivered by anyone who had not been brought up in the Hindu religious tradition. Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal in 1836. He was bom into a world that, in his lifetime, was, for the first time, being united on a literally world-wide scale. Today we are still living in this transitional chapter of the world's history, but it is already becoming clear that a chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race. In the present age, the world has been united on the material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only 'annihilated distance'; it has armed the peoples of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka's and the Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family—and, in the Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

In the Atomic Age the whole human race has a utilitarian motive for following this Indian way. No utilitarian motive could be stronger or more respectable in itself. The survival of the human race is at stake. Yet even the strongest and most respectable utilitarian motive is only a secondary reason for taking Ramakrishna's and Gandhi's and Ashoka's teaching to heart and acting on it. The primary reason is that this teaching is right—and is right because it flows from a true vision of spiritual reality.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama

Sri Ramakrishna was one of the greatest of India's spiritual adepts of recent times, actively embodying India's profound tradition of plurality. By assimilating the sadhanas, customs, and practices of different faiths into his own personal practice, he presented a powerful example of respect for other traditions, even while maintaining a deep fidelity to his own. His transparently pure and well-documented life remains a guide and inspiration to millions on their spiritual path.

Heinrich R. Zimmer

To speak of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching with regard to our present world-

situation means, as the wicked jester-king in *Hamlet* puts it, ‘in equal scale weighing delight and dole’. It means putting the question, what can the spiritual forces of the enlightened and perfect, if the teacher who embodies the Divine, effect in the world-wide struggle and suffering, caused by the demoniac forces of man’s nature; or, in Hindu terms, what can pure *Sattva* achieve against *Rajas*, reckless lust for power, aggressive selfishness, triumphant tyranny, and against *Tamas*, bestiality and sloth of man’s animal nature ?...

The actual task of the individual of today, in so far as he can perceive this problem at all, could be, to become, in the Hindu style, a permanent inmate of both spheres, of this phenomenal world and the supra-phenomenal reality, and ‘render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s’. ...These two realities bar each other, —the phenomenal tangible, and the supra-phenomenal intangible ; they are as if two sides of the same and only coin. They preclude each other logically, but they are meant to be reconciled through life by each of us. That is Sri Ramakrishna’s message on the lines of India’s perennial wisdom.

Leo Tolstoy

Alexander Shifman, Adviser to the Tolstoy State Museum, in his book *Tolstoy and India* writes : ‘During the last decade of Tolstoy’s life Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his pupil Swami Vivekananda occupied his [Tolstoy’s] thoughts. ...

‘On 13 February 1903, Tolstoy read the journal *Theosophischer Wegweister* sent to him from Germany and in his copy underlined a number of Ramakrishna’s aphorisms. “There is much in common with my conception”—he noted in his diary.’

‘Later on, in February 1906, Tolstoy received from his friend and biographer, P.A. Sergeenko, the book *Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa’s Sayings* in English published in 1905 in Madras and read it with interest. “Wonderful sayings! Ramakrishna died 50 [20 ?] years ago. A remarkable sage,” said Tolstoy to a circle of his intimates and read aloud to them some of those sayings by the Indian philosopher.’

‘From the literature about Ramakrishna, Tolstoy selected nearly a hundred sayings and parables which he intended to publish in Russia. However, this publication did not materialise and the writer after carefully working over them included some in his collections of ancient wisdom over which he was working at that time.’

Muhammad Daud Rahbar

Jesus is remembered as the Son of Man. In the recorded history of religion, Sri Ramakrishna shines as a devotee of the Divine Mother. He should, therefore, be remembered as the Son of Woman.

Four miles north of Calcutta, in the Garden of Temples at Dakshineshwar, he began his devotions to Mother Kali and went into rapture when yet only a child. His life from then on is an open book filled with a moving story of worship and adoration. His revelation of the benign Mother of the Universe is a consummation of the spiritual aspirations of matriarchal India.

Like a magnet, Sri Ramakrishna attracted ardent disciples. More than thirty of them maintained intimate association with him. Hundreds of them derived solace and blessing by beholding him and talking to him.

I have read some delightful portions of the one-thousand-page *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This marvellous volume has extraordinary revelations. Immediately one recognizes a cherishable friend in Sri Ramakrishna. His open, passionate, and transparent devotion humbles and chastens us. He is no common mortal. He is a man of phenomenal gifts. His presence is a haven. His conversations, recorded abundantly in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by his disciple M., are charming, inspiring. Their literary merit is due to the inspired goodness of Sri Ramakrishna. ...

We turn now to another genuine quality of Sri Ramakrishna : renunciation. It is perhaps the virtue most vigorously rejected by the politicized civilization of the emerging world. It is condemned by political activists as if it were an adoption of the way of unconcern. The political activists have to go through self-searching to realize that much of the fever and scramble of politics is a symptom of sick spirit. The implementation of the great movement of democratic thought in the world is not simply a matter of equal opportunity to cultivate ambition. Democratic freedom must learn to respect the freedom to renounce. Perhaps it is true to say that in America today, austere forms of creative renunciation are virtually proclaimed illegal. A mendicant spiritual would be looked upon as a vagrant and a parasite. This is tragic. The excessively politicized intelligentsia in the modern world will hastily detect in Sri Ramakrishna an ‘escapist quietism’. An observation on those lines will be rejected by anyone who reads a substantial part of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.* In him we find a bustling renunciation full of excitement, but not escapism or quietism. His life is not one of escape for the soul, rather it is a life busy with fortification of the spirit. His ascetic exercises lead to his faith-building charisma. His experiments with psychology of religion are of both spiritual and scientific value for us. He is not running

away from responsibilities in the world, he is handling them with eminent creativity. He exercises the privilege of inspired selection of occupation. He investigates the secrets of spirit and soul by turning to experienced men and women. He meditates and is an alert onlooker. He is not bookish but is assiduous in enquiries as a student of folk religion through listening to recital of sacred mythology, direct observation, rigorous introspection, conversation and, most of all, through devotion.

He does all that and does not ask anybody for a salary or a stipend as a reward. Nobody has a reasonable right to object to this arrangement.

Any society that bans renunciation and detachment of this kind is heading for impaired mental health and low level of faith. For it deprives itself of a needed source of holy contagion and vibrations of serenity. Every society needs a mixture of infection of animation and equanimity. Every society needs contagion of selflessness and meditative inspiration. ...

The soldierly masculine civilization of the West will have to go through long historical preparation to provide a natural place for the worship of Divine Mother among believers. Nevertheless the assertion of the feminine element has begun. The Western male is not yet effeminate, although perhaps the Western female has become somewhat masculine. ...

I pay tribute to Sri Ramakrishna's device to attain intimacy with Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian life. He demonstrated his own kind of desires and overtures, as against other possible ways of going about the enrichment and broadening of experience. He went about it in a certain mystical way. It is valid, interesting, and meaningful because its motivation was pure. ...

There is a great deal of power politics connected with religion. The scientists and secularists have no doubt contributed much to the removal of dishonesty in religious leadership. But now some of the presumption which used to be the trait of some priests is manifest among many secularist men of science. The autonomy of science and intellect has been overdone. The time has arrived when forces of spirit have to be released. Insight and wisdom are lacking in the intellectual world of today. The faces of secularist scientists seldom have a radiance and magnanimity. Was not the unsophisticated Sri Ramakrishna a gifted scientist in his own right? In his blissful life we find a happy union of religion and science.

Richard Schiffman

If Krishna was enough for Mira, and Jesus sufficient for Saint Francis, then why did Ramakrishna feel the need to cry out in turn to Kali, to Krishna, to

Rama, to Sita, and even ... to Christ and the God of Mohammed? The mystics of the past had gone into the candy shop and made a single selection. Ramakrishna, on the other hand, had exited with hands and mouth and pockets overflowing.

In reflecting upon this mystery, Ramakrishna's disciples would probably say that the Master wanted to demonstrate through his actions that all embodiments of God are great, and that devotion to any one of them ultimately reaches the one Ineffable —God beyond all names and forms, God in all names and forms. This seems reasonable enough. But still, we must wonder whether Ramakrishna was being an intentional and premeditated as all that. Or was he simply driven by a hunger that he would not have tried to rationalize or understand? One thing is certain : the spirit of creedal narrowness that seeks to imprison the Infinite within a single approved symbol for worship was completely alien to his nature. And so was the complacency that rests content with what it already knows. Even in the future, when men gathered at his feet, treasuring his every word, Ramakrishna would ask the newcomer to tell *him* about God, and, if he spoke from genuine experience, the Master would listen rapt with wonder.

Ramakrishna was, by nature, incapable of holding himself aloof. From the moment a newcomer arrived, the Master would be chatting with a transparent sincerity. Invariably, after the briefest civilities, the conversation would turn to God, and devotion; everything else seemed insipid to him. It was not unusual that within minutes Ramakrishna would be taking a perfect stranger into his confidence, speaking of his most intimate visions and other spiritual experiences in the same easy manner that others talk about the weather ... but always without a hint of pride or boasting. Like the child of God he was, the Master would say, 'Mother showed me this . ... Mother told me .... Mother revealed. ...'

Ramakrishna's influence on those who lived within his orbit was manifested at every level, from the most mundane to the most metaphysical. His was a flame that burned and enlightened and that melted down the fixed metal of the whole person, only to remould it again in a simpler, truer form... .

This transformation of character was Ramakrishna's greatest miracle and his most enduring legacy... .

To one and all, Ramakrishna offered a vision of hope. God is not only for the chosen few who become *sannyasis,* but for anyone who cries out to Him with sincere longing. 'Wherein is the strength of a devotee?' he once asked rhetorically. 'He *is* a child of God, and his devotional tears are his mightiest weapon.'

Will Durant

[Ramakrishna] taught his followers [that] each [religion] is a way to God or a stage on the way adapted to the mind and heart of the seeker. To be converted from one religion to another is foolishness; one need only continue on his own way, and reach to the essence of his own faith. [He said,] ‘All rivers flow to the ocean. Flow, and let others flow, too.’ He tolerated sympathetically the polytheism of the people, and accepted humbly the monism of the philosophers, but in his own living faith God was a spirit incarnated in all men, and the only true worship of God was the loving service of mankind.

Many fine souls, rich and poor, Brahmana and pariah, chose him as guru, and formed an order and mission in his name.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

(Diary Leaves)

Prof. Nicholas De Roerich

We are in the deserts of Mongolia. It was hot and dusty yesterday. From far away thunder was approaching. Some of our friends became tired from climbing up the stony holy hills of Shiret Obo. While already returning to the camp, we noticed in the distance a huge elm-tree—”karagatch,” lonely towering amidst the surrounding endless desert. The size of the tree, its somewhat familiar outlines, attracted us into its shadow. Botanical considerations lead to believe that in the wide shade of the giant there may be some interesting herbs for us. Soon all co-workers gathered around the two mighty steins of the karagatch. The deep, deep shadow of the tree covered over fifty feet across. The powerful tree-stems were covered with phantastic burr growths. In the rich foliage birds were singing and the beautiful branches were stretched out into all directions, as if wishing to give shelter to all pilgrims,

On the sands, around the roots, innumerable trails made by animals were visible. Next to the broad imprints of a wolf were small hooves of the dzeren, the local antilope. A horse had also passed here and next to it was the heavy footstep of a bull. All sorts of birds had been here. Apparently the entire local population visited the welcoming shelter of the giant. The elm-karagatch especially reminded us of the huge banyan trees of India. Such trees were the meeting place of blessed gatherings. Many travellers found there both bodily and spiritual rest. Sacred narratives were chanted under the inviting branches of the banyan tree. And thus the lonely giant karagatch in the Mongolian desert vividly turned our memory to the shadow of the banyan. The mighty branches of the karagateh

reminded us also of other great achievements of India. What a joy to think of India! Thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India—Sri Ramakrishna. Around this glorious name there are so many respectful definitions. Sri, Bhagavan, Paramahamsa—all best offerings through which the people wish to express their esteem and reverence. The consciousness of a nation knows how to bestow names of honour. And after all, above all most venerable titles, there remains over the whole world the one great name—Ramakrishna. The personal name has already changed into a great all-national, universal concept. Who has not heard the Blessed Name ! The conception of goodness and benevolence truly befits him. Except for petrified hearts, who would oppose the Good !

We recollect how in various countries has grown, the understanding of the radiant Teaching of Ramakrishna. Beyond shameful words of hatred, beyond evil mutual destruction—the word of Bliss, which is close to every human heart, spreads widely like the mighty branches of the sacred banyan tree. On the paths of human searching, these calls of goodwill were shining like beacons. We ourselves witnessed and have often heard how books of Ramakrishna's Teaching were as if unexpectedly found by sincere seekers. We ourselves came across the book in a most unusual way.

Hundreds of thousands, even an entire million of pilgrims gather on the memorable day in the name of the Blessed Bhagavan. They gather, being called by an inner impulse of the heart, in goodwill and they become rejuvenated by blissful remembrances and strivings. Is this not a most remarkable expression of the voice of the people ! This is the nation's judgment, the reverence of the people, which cannot be compelled nor forcefully commanded. As wonderful lights they spread from one to another forming an inexhaustible flame, hence such national reverence is not dimmed, but radiates throughout the times of contemporary world commotions.

Too many crises grip the people at present. It could happen that the spirit of the people could become confused and distracted from the spiritual fundamentals. The wail about the shattering of the foundations is so often heard nowadays. But is not this million of pilgrims, who assembled by their own free will, the best living proof that above the confusions of today, there lives in the hearts an inexhaustible spirituality and striving towards the Good, We are optimists and conquer all obstacles through goodwill.

Behold, on an unbearably hot day, not being frightened of distances, pilgrims are hastening, in order to venerate the memory of Ramakrishna. Is this not a remarkable event ! For it is not an official duty which brings together all the

multifarious travellers. A pure heart and a sincere striving imperatively leads them to the places consecrated by the name of Ramakrishna. Such a spiritual gathering is the most precious evidence in our days. It is wonderful that amidst the heavy labour, amidst doubts, amidst depression, people yet can be lit by the flame of gratitude and veneration. Their hearts call them together. They are gathering not for destruction, nor for quarrels, nor for insults, but in order to unite their thoughts upon the Good.

Great power is contained in a united benevolent thought. Humanity should value such sublime manifestations, which are the cause of all these unifying and constructive thoughts. Creative is the thought of Good ! The good never destroys, it untiringly elevates and builds. By commands of good are affirmed those eternal foundations, which have been ordained to humanity on all the best tablets. The call of the Blessed Bhagavan for creative Good will for ever remain the great spiritual heritage of humanity.

Light is especially precious during the hours of darkness. May the Light be eternally preserved ! In his parables about the Good, Ramakrishna never belittled anyone. And not only in the Teaching, in parables, but in his own deeds he never tolerated demeaning. Let us remember his reverent attitude towards all religions. Such broad understanding will move even a stony heart. In his broad outlook, the Blessed Bhagavan of course possessed a real straight-knowledge. His power of healing he in turn gave out freely. He never hid anything useful. He exhausted his strength in innumerable blessed givings. And even his illness of course was due to such constant self-sacrificing outpouring of his spiritual energy for the healing of others. And in these generous gifts Ramakrishna manifested his greatness.

In all parts of the world the name of Ramakrishna is venerated. Also is revered Swami Vivekananda, who symbolizes true discipleship. The names of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and the glorious host of their followers remain on the most remarkable pages of the history of the spiritual culture of India. The astounding depth of thought, which is characteristic of India, the beautiful manifestation of Guru and Chela—remind the whole world of basic ideals. Ages pass, whole civilizations change, but the Guru and Chela remain in the same wise relationship, which was since antiquity established in India. Many millenniums ago the words of Wisdom were already recorded in India. And how many more milleniums were they preserved even before, in verbal transmission. And in this sacred mouth-to-ear transmission they were kept perhaps even safer than on written reccords. The ability to keep up the correct meaning depends on a developed wise consciousness and in this is contained the application of

precious stones of the past for the radiant future.

Not only the everlasting value of the Teaching of Good affirmed by Ramakrishna, but precisely the necessity of these words especially for our times is unquestionable. When spirituality, as such, is being so often refuted through wrongly interpreted formulae, then the radiant constructive affirmation as a beacon becomes especially precious. One has but to know the colossal number of editions of the Ramakrishna Mission, One has but to remember the large number of cities in which this Mission has its branches. These figures require no exaggeration. There is no unnatural nervousness and no premedifatedness in these quiet thought-creating gatherings. Everything is deeply realized not in tumult and rush, but grows in highest eommeasurement. The thoughts about the Good, which Ramakrishna so generously taught, should awaken the best sides of human hearts. Ramakrishna always preached against deniers and destruction. He was in all respects a builder for the Good, and his admirers should unfold on the examples of his Teaching the best hidden treasures of their hearts. Such beneficial creativeness is very active. And it naturally is transmuted also into best achievements on all paths of life. Gathering on the memorable day of Ramakrishna's anniversary, the pilgrims do not fear the dust of the road, they are not frightened by the fatiguing heat, but they are filled with a striving towards the Good, towards the great service to humanity. Service to Humanity—great is this ordainment of Ramakrishna !

Reverence to the Teacher !

"I recall a small Hindu who found his Teacher. We asked him : ls it possible that the sun would glow to you, if you would see it without the Teacher?"

"The boy smiled, The sun would remain as the sun, but in the presence of the Teacher twelve suns would shine to me!"

"The sun of wisdom of India shall shine because upon the shores of a river there sits a boy who knows the Teacher." *Timur Khada (Mongolia). Aug. 7th 1935.*

RAMAKRISHNA AND WHAT HE STANDS FOR

Count Hermann Keyserling

A long time has elapsed since Hindu Saintliness was a main object of my interest and studies. In the years of full maturity each and all who feel responsible for spiritual progress of mankind have to limit themselves exclusively to the creative task cut out for them by their inborn and acquired abilities. But when I think back now to the years 1911-14, when Indian wisdom

was my daily food, I cannot help being overcome by a feeling of particular *warmth*, when concentrating on the saint of Dakshineswar. He does indeed stand for something eternal. For Bhakti in its aspect of gentleness, of unworldly goodwill, for a kind of "charity" which is probably the most truly Christian of all but which has almost disappeared in the West, owing to the ever-increasing aggressiveness which is specially Western variety of Truth-seeking. The age we are living in since the War is probably the least propitious to the culture of Bhakti, the world has known for a thousand years. There will be evermore wars, evermore bloodshed, evermore violence. India itself will no doubt be carried away, sooner or later, by that same spirit of aggressiveness. All the more necessary do I think the permanence and influence of such centres of love as are able to survive in a chaotic world. Theirs will be the *role* of the monasteries in Europe during those invasions of the barbarians which initiated our middle ages. All my best thoughts and wishes will always accompany all work carried out and on, in Ramakrishna's spirit.

RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA

The Rt. Hon. The Earl Of Ronaldshay, P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., ETC.

The temple of Dakshjneswar. a few miles above Calcutta, is easily picked out by any one steaming up the river (Hughly), by means of a group of tall casuarina trees, which can be seen from afar, standing in the temple grounds. It was built by a pious Bengali lady. Rani Rasmani, in the year A.D. 1855. and it was here that the famous saint of Dakshineswar spent the greater part of his life. Few men have made a deeper impress upon the mind of Bengal in recent years than Gadadhar Chatterji, known to history as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. and his chief disciple Narendra Nath Dutt. better known under the title of Swami Vivekananda. At a time when the craze for the ideas and ways of the West was at its height, these men stood for the ancient ideal of the East, for renunciation in an age of megalomania, for simplicity at a time when discoveries in mechanical science were making life elaborately complex.

Born of Brahman parents on February 20, 1834. (?) Gadadhar Chatterji found himself drawn to a religious life from his boyhood, and he became an assistant priest at the temple of Dakshineswar from the date of its construction in 1855. He was no scholar, yet he possessed the power of attracting to himself men of light and leading of the day—Keshub Chandra Sen, Pandit Isvar Chandra Vidyasagar. Bankim Chatterji and Protap Chandra Majumdar amongst others. The latter, one of the most devoted followers of Keshub Chandra Sen, seems to

have been forcibly struck and a good deal puzzled by the influence which Ramakrishna exercised over educated men. “What is there in common between him and me ?” he asked. “I, an Europeanised, civilised, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee ? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines? ... And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same.” And after due deliberation he comes to the conclusion that it is his religion that is his only recommendation. But his religion itself is a puzzle. “He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantic doctrines. ... He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the One formless, infinite Deity.... His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling.”

He studied the doctrine of the Vedanta at the feet of one Tota Puri, a holy man who took up his abode at the temple for the space of nearly a year. But it was along the path of worship (Bhakti) rather than by way of knowledge (Jnana) that he sought for the solution of the mystery of the universe. By temperament he was a mystic rather than a philosopher. The narrative of his life and teaching recalls inevitably the emotional figure of Chaitanya. Like the great Vaishnava saint of Nadia he gave vent to his pent-up feelings in song and dance. Hymns to the deity sung by his favourite disciples reduced him to tears, and frequently induced in him a state of trance. He was subject to such trances from his boyhood, his first experience taking place at the age of eleven, when, according to his own account, he suddenly saw a vision of glory, and lost all sense-consciousness while walking through the fields. His knowledge of God was intuitive, and he never felt the need of systematic study. A discussion on the subject of the study of the Scriptures was once in progress among his disciples when he exclaimed, “Do you know what I think of it ? Books—sacred scriptures —all point the way to God. Once you know the way, what is the use of books ?” A young man, typical of the educated middle classes of the day, obviously proud of his scholarship and knowledge of books and men. proceeded one day to the temple, attracted by the growing fame of the saint. On learning that he was no scholar and had no use for books, he expressed extreme surprise, and at his first meeting embarked upon an argument with him on the subject of image worship. Ramakrishna swept aside his scholarly arguments. “Why must you worry

yourself about things above you and beyond your reach ?" he asked. "Does not the Lord of the universe abide in the temple of the human body and know the innermost thoughts of men? Seek then to know and revere God. Love God. That is the duty nearest you."

Apparent contradictions were nothing to him. God is the Absolute, the One, the All. the Brahman of the philosopher. But that does not prevent him from manifesting Himself in different aspects in His relations with the phenomenal world—as Krishna in His aspect of divine love, as Kali in His aspect of creator of the universe and saviour of mankind. And when you realize God. such things cease to puzzle. "Sir. is it possible to see God ?" asked the scholar. "Certainly." came the reply. "Cry unto the Lord with a yearning heart, and you shall see Him." It is clear from the testimony of his disciple that he himself constantly attained that pitch of spiritual exaltation which is called by the Hindus Samadhi, a state of trance induced by God-consciousness—that communion with the Infinite enjoyed by the Rishis of old and spoken of by Professor B. N. Sen as the bliss of Brahman, which is beyond all word; and above all reason.

With even scantier consideration he brushed aside the question of the apparent partiality of God. "Am I then. Sir." asked Pandit Vidyasagar on one occasion, "to believe that we come into the world with unequal endowments ? Is the Lord partial to a select few?" To which the Master replied:

"Well. I am afraid you will have to take the facts of the universe as they stand. It is not given to man to see clearly into the ways of the Lord."

The value which he attached to reaunciation and inspiration respectively, is well illustrated by a scene which took place one afternoon in the presence of a number of his disciples in the grounds of the temple. "Is there any book in English on the art of reasoning?" he asked one of his Western-educated followers. He was informed that there were such treatises and, as an example, was told of that part of logic which dealt with reasoning from general propositions to particulars. He appeared to pay little attention to these explanaions. which evidently fell flat upon his ear. And looking at him a little while after, his would-be instructor marvelled and became speechless. I give the description of the scene in his own words. "The Master stands motionless. His eyes are fixed. It is hard to say whether he is breathing or not. . . . The smile on his lips shows ecstatic delight that he feels at the sight of the blessed vision. Yes, he must be enjoying a vision of unequalled beauty which puts into the shade the refulgence of a million moons ! Is this God vision ? If so,what must be the intensity of Faith and Devotion, of Discipline and Austerity which has brought such a vision within reach of mortal man?" The writer goes on to tell us that he

wended his way home with this unique picture of Samadhi and the ecstasy of divine love vividly reflected in his mind, and that there echoed within him as he went these words. “Be incessantly merged, O my mind, in the sweetness of his love and bliss ! Yes. be thou drunken with the joy of the Lord!”

Ramakrishna did not dissent from the monistic explanation of the universe. It was only that he was driven by temperament to attach far greater importance to the Personal Aspect of God. The Absolute of Sankara could be realized, but only in perfect Samadhi. On one occasion half returning to consciousness from a state of trance he was heard exclaiming. “Yes. my Holy Mother (Kali) is none other than the Absolute. She it is to whom the six systems of philosophy with all their learned disquisitions furnish no clue.” But when a man returned from Samadhi he became a differentiated ego once more, and was thrown back upon the world of relativity so that he perceived the world-system (Maya) us real. Why ? Because with the return of his egoity he was convinced that he as an individual was real ; and “so long as his ego is real to him (real relatively) the world is real too. and the Absolute is unreal (unreal relatively).” He laid constant stress upon this.

The saint returning from Samadhi could say nothing about the Absolute. “Once differentiated, he is mute as to the undifferentiated. Once in the relative world his mouth is shut as to the Absolute and Unconditioned.” And since Samadhi was not achieved by the average man. he must meditate upon and commune with the Personal God. for “so long as you are a person you cannot conceive of, think or perceive God otherwise than as a Person.”

In Ramakrishna’s own case this latter difficulty was undoubtedly a predilection as much as a necessity, for by temperament he was emotional rather than critical. “As a rule,” he declared, “the devotee does not long tor the realization of the Impersonal. He is anxious that the whole of his ego should not be effaced in Samadhi.” And the reason which he gives is the one to be expected from a man of his temperament. “He would have sufficient individuality left to him to enjoy the Vision Divine as a person. He would taste the sugar in place of being one with the sugar itself.”

His creed was summed up by him during a visit to Pandit Sasadhar in Calcutta one afternoon in 1884. Many paths lead to God, the path of knowledge, that of works and that of self-surrender and devotion. The way of knowledge is tor the philosopher. His object is to realize Brahman, the Absolute. He says “Neti. Neti” (nol this, not this), and so eliminates one unreal thing after another until he arrives at a point at which all discrimination between the Real and the Unreal ceases. The way of works is that laid down in the Gita, to live in the world but not to be of the world ; to practise at all times an exalted altruism. Neither of

these paths is easy to travel in the present age. It is almost impossible in these materialistic days to get rid of the conviction that the self is identical with the body. How. then, can a man understand that he is one with the universal soul, the Being Absolute and Unconditioned ? Similarly with the way of works. A man may form a resolution to work without expectation of any reward or fear of punishment in this world or the next ; but the chances are that consciously or unconsciously he will get attached to the fruit of his work. Let a man then choose the way of worship and seek communion with the Personal God, for the Path of love, adoration and self-surrender to God is the easiest of all paths. It teaches the necessity of prayer without ceasing, it is in this age "the shortest cut leading to God."

[*The Heart of Aryavarta,* published by Constable and Company Ltd., London. Second Printing**.**]

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE

Rev. James B. Muckle

(Address delivered on the occasion of the Sri Ramakrishna Birth Anniversary celebration in 1953, organized by the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, U.S.A.)

We come here tonight to delve a little deeper into the religion and philosophy of the world. We come here to honour that great Hindu saint and mystic, Ramakrishna.

As I read once again that great book *Prophet of New India,* I could not help but feel akin to the thinking of that great teacher Ramakrishna and his devoted disciple Vivekananda. India has long been the mother country of many great and famous religions, so it is not unusual that in the nineteenth century another great awakening took place—this time under Ramakrishna. I think it is natural and logical to look over the field of action in religion.

There seem to be three principal types of techniques that man uses to place himself directly into relation with a divine being whom we shall call God. These three are : ritual, supplication, and contemplation; and each has played a part in the major religions which have sought to find this closeness and understanding of God.

Many religions depend on ritual to bring the individual follower into harmony with God. They will build a magnificent, ornate building dedicated to their deity.

They will make effective use of subdued lighting, soft carpeting, and the burning of incense and candles to bring disciples into a closeness with God. This ritual really means the doing of the right thing at the right time in the right place in order to achieve a goal. The goal may be seeking help from God in some daily problem. It may be the need of assistance and assurance from a source that is unending and unfailing. It may be comfort, or guidance, or any one of the things that you and I seek from our God. By living according to the laws' of God, one hopes and knows that ultimately he will receive this divine-relief. There is an automatic relation, as it were, between doing right and receiving the help of the supernatural order. Ritual may be classed as religious because in it many people receive a definite religious experience which causes them to do something about it.

The second approach in religion may be called supplication. This can be supplication through prayer, wherein we bow our heads, or kneel and humble ourselves to God ; or sacrifice. We place our God here as a personal God, a Father, or a great saint to whom we can come for help and forgiveness. This is the Christian point of view. Sacrifice, as a type of supplication, is bringing material gifts to be given to God or to the uses of the religious orders. More dramatic is the use of animals, or even people, as actual sacrificial gifts to beg audience with the Father. It is like a small child who wishes to go to a circus and has been told by his father that he cannot go. By cajoling and begging, perhaps threatening or promising, he hopes to change the father's mind.

Whereas in ritual we approach God by laws and order, in supplication we approach Him as an actual person who is capable of making decisions and changing his mind, as it were, by the appeals of his children. The third type of action that is used to approach God is that which we call contemplation. Those of the East have used this mechanism to a greater degree than the usual religions of the West. Here, the individual worshipper prepares his mind (by contemplation) to receive the will of the deity. He readies himself by various devices so that he may be acceptable to his reception. The God who is worshipped in this manner is a much less personal God—one who is everywhere and yet not touchable, one who is immanent as well as transcendent. We have termed these religions 'mystical religions' and they are those such as we find in your beloved India.

Whichever the way in which man reaches his God, reach Him he must : for there is a wide river between what man imagines the world should be and what it actually is. The religious beliefs of individuals are systems oi orientation which give definition to the situation—to the meaning ot nature, of man, or society, the

vicissitudes of human life—and man tries to reduce the tension and strain that just plain living brings. However, there is adjustment and defence needed in explaining things that happen to us— premature death, in fact the mortality of men in general, ‘meaningless’ suffering, ‘the problems of evil’, and unearned rewards. Man’s knowledge of the physical world and his expectations of what should happen cannot alone constitute adequate adjustment to life. He must add a higher, evaluative element so that these ‘irrational’ discrepancies, which seem so inevitable, will not break down his way of living.

Man needs a ‘light unto his pathway’, tor he must walk into the light—with vision of his steps. Man can never walk long away from the light, for then he must falter and fall. God has sent His prophets to earth to tell man that there is but one God and that we, His people, are but one people. He has meant His light to shine for all humanity, not to be turned to just one corner of His world or to one section. Where there is light, fear and ignorance melt away.

God has not restricted His teachings to one race, or to one country. Within this room—for each individual there is perhaps a different concept of God because each one has a different need and each a different way to express his union with God. The Word of God is open to all mankind—to withhold it from any man is to withhold life itself.

Many Christians claim the New Testament, but would disclaim the Old. The Old Testament is a root from which two great branches have sprung—the Jewish Faith and the Christian Faith. One needs the background and the teachings and the individual lives and faith of each man in the chain out of trials and errors and eventual successes man struggled closer towards the Truth.

Jesus Christ lived and walked with mankind, and when He left His influence was to remain so that man could reach the peak of Ultimate Understanding. His teachings are still above most of our achievements, but they remain as a magnet to hold us from going backward.

Mohammed announced that his followers must acknowledge Moses and Jesus the Christ. He taught that there was but one omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, relentless, merciful, everlasting, and eternal God—’no distinction do we make between any of His messengers ; follow ye, O people, the messengers of God! All mankind is but one people’.

Ramakrrishna lives very near to the heart of many Western people because they see him as a man and not as an Incarnation as he appears to his disciples. Ramakrishna’s very human approach to the daily problems of life is what endears him to many people. Ramakrishna said to his disciples: Are you seeking God ? Very well, look for Him in man ; the divinity is manifest itself in man more than in any other object. In truth God is everything ; but His power is more

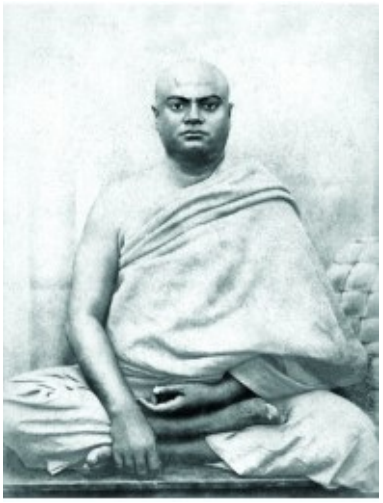
or less manifest in other objects. God incarnate in man is the most manifest power of God in the flesh—man is the greatest manifestation of God. And then he goes on to say, ‘the attainment of perfect knowledge is to see God in every man’. When a person like Ramakrishna speaks words like these surely he is very close to God.

Centuries ago, Plato was denounced as irreligious because he no longer believed in the existence of Homeric gods in a literal sense, and certainly not in all the tales that were told about them in the mythological tradition. He felt as much as he understood that religion, to survive in an enlightened society, must attain its answer in One Mind and Will, not in many.

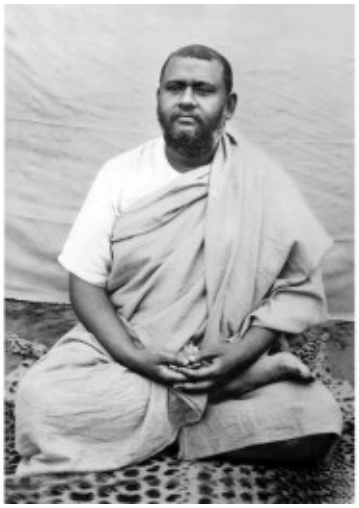
In achieving also a new conscience, it was gradually expressed that God need not be simply all-powerful but that He shall be supremely good. He can neither commit nor approve any evil thing, so that in being true to conscience one is loyal also to God. Indeed, one may say that in being and doing good one does not become happy and tireless until it is regarded as achieving in time some eternal purpose of the Ultimate Divinity. All of us cannot help but feel that if religion is to last and be of value, it must have the aroma of saintly men and women, the assurance of immortality, and some present experience of the supernatural. God does respond to him who faithfully observes, supplicates, and contemplates and submits himself to the good. As Wordsworth said,

‘I have felt a presence that disturbs me
With the joy of elevated thoughts’.

The gift of God to this enlightened age is the knowledge of the oneness of mankind. Now is the time for unity. Now is the time to lay aside all self-purposes and know for a certainty that all men are the servants of one God who will bind them together in love and agreement. Mature man is no longer his brother’s keeper ; he is his brother’s brother.



Swami Vivekananda



SW Brahmananda

SW Abhedananda

SW Adbhutananda

SW Advaitananda

SW Akhandananda

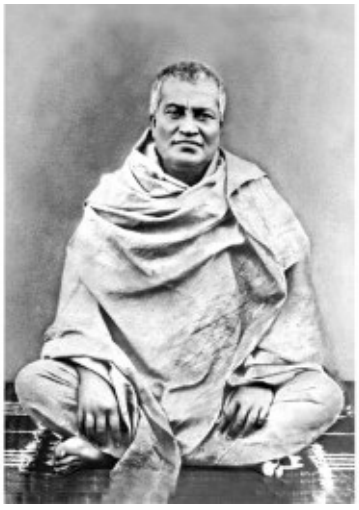
SW Yogananda

SW Niranjananda

SW Premananda

SW Ramakrishnananda

SW Saradananda

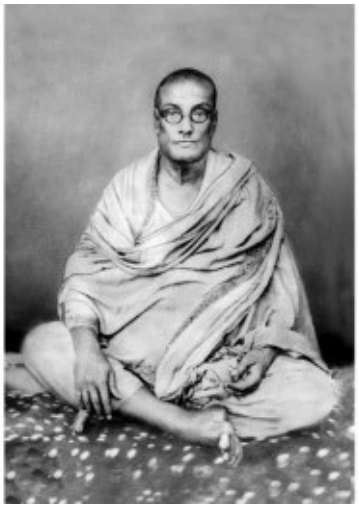


SW Shivananda

SW Subodhananda

SW Trigunatinananda

SW Turiyananda



SW Vijnanananand

THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION

Swami Vireswarananda

The Ramakrishna Movement was initiated by the disciples of Sri Ramkrishna soon after his passing away in 1886. It was inspired by his life and teachings and worked out cheifly by his monastic disciples. Swami Vivekananda, however, gave to this movement a more practical shape in 1897, on his return from the West.

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86) was born in a distant village of Bengal; and early in life, he became the priest of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, a beautiful spot on the Ganga ; some four miles north of Calcutta. He had great love for God from his very childhood ; and this led him, now that he was placed in favourable environment, to make an intense search for Him. Through an intense longing to see God and dispassion for things material, he as it were, 'laid siege to the citadel of God and took it by storm' and attained God-vision. His entire life afterwards was lived in the highest plane of spiritual consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna had realized Truth not only through the disciplines prescribed by Hinduism, but also through those prescribed by other religions, thereby proving by direct experience that all religions are true paths to God-realization. Such a bold assertion about the truths of all religious faith was the greatest need of the age. It infused new life into religion, and what appeared to be mere superstition so long acquired significance. Through his variegated spiritual experiences, he arrived at a synthetic harmony that reconciled all conflicting views of life and religion. To him, all beings were little bits of that infinite God-head : and his love, therefore, was all-inclusive, irrespetive of class, creed, race or nationality. Today, this great soul is worshipped in India and abroad as a spiritual luminary of the first magnitude like the great saviours of the past.

The Ramakrishna Order

During the last few years of Sri Ramakrishna's life, many sincere and yearning souls had come to him attracted by his spirituality. With great care and love, he trained these disciples, a good number of whom later embraced the monastic life, true to the spirit of renunciation he had infused in them. Foremost

amongs them was Swami Vivekananda. After the passing away of the Master, the Swami travelled all over India, leading the life of an itinerant monk ; and in his travels, he saw with his own eyes the miserable plight of his motherland steeped in squalor, poverty,, and ignorance. He was filled with a fervour to uplift his motherland; and with this object in view, he crossed the seas and went to the United States of America. There he presented Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. His interpretation of Hinduism impressed enlightened Americans of various walks of life, and all earnest seekers of Truth were drawn to him. For four years, he preached the eternal truths of the Vedanta in U.S.A. and Europe, which the Westerners were sorely in need of. And these years of his life in the West gave him an opportunity to study the good and weak points in the Western nations; and by comparison and contrast with his own motherland, he realized the greatness of India in many fundamental things. But he had also realized that there was much superstition, poverty, and ignorance in this country.

On his return from the West, the Swami formulated for the monks of the Ramakrishna Order the true significance of the monk's life in one pithy sentence. 'For one's own liberation and for the good of the world." He admonished them to give up the selfish idea of leading the life of a recluse and to dedicate themselves to the service of others, to see God in the sick, the poor, and the ignorant and render service, as worship, to this God in man. With this angle of vision, he asked them to distribute spiritual, intellectual, and material food, according to the needs of the sufferer. The stress was on God-realization. Such a sadhana or spiritual practice was presented as on a par with the traditional disciplines. Social service was. as it were, a byproduct of this divine worship. The Swami's message, therefore, cannot he evaluated in terms of philanthropy or social service, for fundamentally it is a spiritual one. This service to man, seeing the God in him. is the Swami's greatest gift to the modern world of strife, competition, and war.

The Ramakrishna Mission

On May 1, 1897, Swami Vivekananda had established an association called the Ramakrishna Mission Association to unite the lay and monastic followers of the Master in a common organized effort for the service of humanity. After the starting of the Belur Math in 1899, this association ceased to function as an independent organization, and the Math itself carried on the preaching, educational, and philanthropic activities. With the extension of the activities, it was found necessary to have a separate organization for better facilities of work and more efficient management of the activities. It was also found necessary to

give the organization a legal status. So, in 1909, a society under the name of the Ramakrishna Mission was registered under Act XXI of I860. The management of the Mission is vested in a Governing Body consisting of the Trustees of the Belur monastery for the time being. This Governing Body is responsible to the Association, consisting of lay and monastic members. Everyone who has full sympathy for the objects of the Mission, and is prepared to accept all religions as paths to God and live in peace and fellowship with the followers of all religions, is eligible to become a member of the Mission. The Mission membership today includes men and women of various religious faiths and nationalities. The branch centres of the Mission, spread all over India and abroad, are under the control of the Governing Body, though often placed under the management of local committees, most of whose members and office-bearers are public men of the place. The principal workers of the Mission, however, are the monastic members of the Ramakrishna Order. They are helped by local friends and admirers. Trie activities of the Mission, which entail enormous expenditure—in 1961-1962 it was about 1.5 crores for its permanent activities alone—are maintained by subscriptions and donations from the general public as well as grants from State and Central governments and public bodies. Funds earmarked for any purpose are spent for that particular purpose ; and funds of the branches are exclusively used for the welfare of the respective branch centres towards the promotion of their various activities. The branches and headquarters publish periodical—mostly annual—reports of their activities along with the accounts which are audited by certified auditors appointed by the Association in their General Meeting. The Mission renders service irrespective .of caste, creed, colour, position, or nationality.

The Ramakrishna Maths

These are monasteries devoted to religious study, worship, meditation, and preaching. They, like the Mission centres, are scattered all over India and abroad. The monks of the Ramakrishna Order get their spiritual training in these monasteries. The Ramakrishna Maths affiliated to the Belur Math, started by Swami Vivekananda in 1899, are under the control of the Board of Trustees of the Belur Math, with its headquarters at the latter place. All the Maths have temples or chapels, where the presiding deity is Sri Ramakrishna. These Maths are financed by friends and devotees . When the Math centres carry on activitives of the kind undertaken by the Mission, they, too. get help from the general public. and grants from the government and public bodies. The Math funds are also audited by certified auditors approved by.the Trustees.

The above distinction between the Math and the Mission proper is only a

technical one ; and the two sister institutions are by no means water-tight compartments, being placed as they are under the management of the same group of monks, the Trustees and Governing body members, respectively, of the two institutions. There are, again, many centres which are combined Math and Mission centres, and again, there are purely Math centres carrying on activities of the kind undertaken by the Mission. For these reasons, it is very difficult to review their activities separately.

The activities of the Math and Mission in India can he broadly divided into three groups : (a) Spiritual and Cultural, (b) Educational. and (e) Philanthropic.

Spiritual and Cultural

The Math and Mission centres, specially the former, spread the spiritual teachings and cultural ideals as illustrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishiia. This is done through public lectures and classes, birthday celebrations of the Master and other great incarnations and prophets, celebrations of Hindu festivities like the Durga Puja. etc., running of reading rooms and public libraries, and the publication of religious literature and magazines. Some of the centres have published a good amount of literature in various provincial languages, besides English, on the life and teachings of the master and his disciples, as also translations of standard Sanskrit works on philosophy and religion, it is noteworthy that, during the birth centenary year of Swami Vivekananda, the Complete works of the Swami were published in nine Indian Languages.

Educational Activities

Education is not to be merely informative or practical and useful, but formative. The development of intellectual capacity alone will lead us nowhere. People who are all intellect, and nothing else, may not be quite welcome members of any society, for without a firm moral foundation, such an intellect may be a danger to society. Nor can mere breadwinning be the ultimate aim of education. Education, to be worth its name, must help one to build character and to be a good citizen doing one’s duty by one’s fellowmen. ‘Education’, as Swami Vivekananda put it, ‘is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.’ To atttain this goal of education, living with the *guru* (teacher), as of old, is quite essential. So many.of the Mission educational institutions are residential or partly so, and religious institutions forms an important feature in all of them. In addition to the college and school curricula, vocational training in various arts and crafts, like cane-work, carpentry, weaving, leather-work, etc. is given to the students in most of these institutions, specially in the residential ones. Sports and physical training are encouraged. In short, an attempt is made to .help the

students manifest the perfection already in them by making the environments suitable for building a healthy body, a healthy intellect, and a healthy mind.

In the education of girls, while all these ideals are stressed, particular care is taken to see that they imbibe all that is best in the Indian womanhood of the past, as seen in characters like Sita, Savitri. Mira Bai, and others. Fine arts, domestic hygene, cooking, etc. form part of their education.

Philanthropic Activities

Activities in this line are either permanent ones, or of a temporary nature. Under the first category come the hospitals, the dispensaries, the invalid homes, etc. Under the second category come all temporary relief works which are launched now and then, whenever there are famines, floods, fires, earthquakes, or outbreak of epidemics like cholera, smallpox, plague, etc. On such occasions, every monk who can possibly be released from his oridinary duties is moved to the scene of the catastrophe for rendering service to suffering humanity. The hospitals and dispensaries are called ‘Sevashramas’ or ‘Homes of Service’. A good number of them are located in places of pilgrimage like Varanasi, Vrindaban. Hardwar, etc. and in the interior of the Himalayas and in distant villages. In large towns, such dispensaries render service to the poorer section of the people.

Relief Work

After the independence of the country in 1947. the Government takes the initiative in starting relief measures wherever any calamities, natural or otherwise, take place. Therefore, the Mission’s relief activities have occupied a secondary place in its scheme of work since 1947. In spite of this fact, a large-scale relief operations are being carried out by the Mission.

Work Outside India

The centres outside India are under the spiritual leadership of the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. These monks are sent to foreign lands at the invitation of the local students of Vedanta and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Through lectures, classes, and interviews, the Swamis preach the fundamentals of Vedanta and harmony of religions, as taught by Sri Ramakrishna. They lay stress on the universal teachings of the Vedanta—the divine nature of man and the oneness of the universe. They do not attempt at converting people to the Hindu faith.

Conclusion

Thus it will be seen that the movement, inaugurated by the great Master, Sri Ramakrishna, galvanized into an organizational force by the illustrious leader, Swarni Vivekananda, and strengthened and enlarged by his brother disciples, has crystalized today into a dynamic institution, seeking in its humble way to mould the social and spiritual aspirations of humanity at large according to the concept of universal religion, as preached and practised by those two prophets of modern age.

EARLY DAYS OF BELUR MATH

Swami Someswarananda

Some eighty-two years ago, a small group of homeless young men acquired a plot of land in a sleepy little village on the bank of the Ganga as site for a permanent monastic home. The place was remote, jungly, marshy, with no electricity, gas or protected .water supply. It was infested with malaria. Other than the river the only access to the place was through a small lane, full of pits and ditches.

Calcutta was only a few miles away. Yet many were afraid to go there even in day-time. Overgrown with jungle and big trees, it was a hide-out for jackals and men of the underworld. Small huts stood here and there inhabited by a few poor villagers.

That was Belur—an unknown village during those days, but now an internationally known pilgrim centre humming with activity. Millions of visitors from all over the world come there, pay their respect to the presiding Deity of the place, and go back with peace of mind, and a feeling of blessedness. Special tourist buses bring everyday hundreds of visitors, both Indian and foreign. Five bus-routes and one steamer-route have included this village in their map. More than thirty local electric trains stop there daily. One finds even a helipad there nowadays.

There is no more the jungle there. Thousands of people now reside in the village ; and though there are still some jackals, thugs have vanished. The scene has totally changed. Three colleges, a dozen schools, two engineering institutes, and many other educational institutions have come up, along with many factories.

That small plot of land acquired by the monks is now famous as Belur Math (Belur Monastery) the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna

Mission with their 118 branches spread all over the world. How did this transformation take place ? One can find the answer in many hooks including the monumental work *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.* But the fascinating story of those early years—the living conditions in the Math, the daily routine of the members, how the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught the younger monks, and similar details—has not been fully told. Here we wish to present the inside story of those early days. By ‘early days’ we mean only four years—March 1898 to July 1902. Though almost all published books on the subject, including some rare ones, have been consulted, the present article is substantially based on many unpublished documents, specially the personal diaries written by the monks of those days.

Purchase of the land

Soon after his return to India from the West Swami Vivekananda asked Swamis Niranjanananda and Vijnanananda (then Brahmarchari Hariprasanna) to search for a suitable plot of land on the eastern bank of the Ganga. They saw many plots which were either too small or costly. One day when Swamis Niranjanananda and Vijnanananda were going to the north near the western bank by a boat, they saw a plot of land covered with jungle and with a bungalow. They found a canal near-by where some boats and crafts were tied to trees. Landing there they at first could not see anyone. Coming to a store made of planks, they found a gentleman there who gave them the name and address of the owner of the land and told them that the owner might sell the land. It belonged to Sri Bhagavat Narayan Singh, a resident of Patna. They met the owner and arrived at an agreement about the sale of the plot.On February 3, 1898, Rs. 1,001 was paid as advance,and on the fourth of the following month Rs. 38,999 was paid and the land was secured. On March 5, 1898, between 12 noon and 1 p.m. the indenture was presented at Howrah Sub-Registry Office for the registration in the name of Swami Vivekananda.

This plot was one of two which, after a good deal of search, had originally been selected—the other one being at Peneti, north of Dakshineswar. Miss Muller had objected to the Belur land as it was uneven and full of pits and ditches. Swamiji had not liked the Peneti land as it was far away from Calcutta and the devotees would find it very difficult to visit the Math frequently. As no other suitable land was found, the choice ultimately fell to the Belur land.

The nature of the land

The area of the newly acquired land was nearly seven acres. There were two

entrances—a southern gate opening to Kathgola Lane (now renamed Sarat Atta Lane), and a small northern gate near Hem Pal Lane. The land was bounded on the north partly by the garden-house of Sri Haridhan Datta and partly by the land of Sri Shambhu Chandra Pal. Sri Datta's land was later purchased by Belur Math and the house came to be known as Leggett House. On the south the Math area was bounded partly by the land of Kumar Shrish Chandra Singh and partly by the land^ of the above said vendor. On the east there was the river Ganga, and on the west there was a public road (Kathgola Lane).

The land was almost uninhabitable, though there was a one-storeyed dwelling. A portion of the !and had formerly been used as a small dockyard of Hore-Miller Company for repairing small craft and boats. The existing land between the temples of Holy Mother and Swamiji was used for that purpose, and the three deodar trees still standing there were used for tying the craft and boats.

A portion of the land was bounded by brick walls and the area was full of trees. There were three ponds and a small well. On the southern side of Gol-pukur, one of the ponds, there were many banana trees. Before the purchase of the land, one day when Holy Mother was passing by in a boat along the river she had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna near that banana grove which stood to the southeast of the present Mission headquarters office building. Some of the coconut trees which were around that pond can be seen even today, indicating the area of the pond on the eastern side of the Mission headquarters building. Another pond, named Padmapukur, was on the northern side of the present-day shoe-keeping stand. That pond was full of lotus plants, and the flowers were later used in the shrine. There were some trees around the pond, and two mango trees still stand which can be seen near the present road going from south to north by the western side of the Ramakrishna temple. The third pond, Pachapukur by name, was near the present barbed-wire fence on the western side of the Ramakrishna temple.

Bel *(bilva)* tree stood near the existing Swamiji temple, though the present tree was planted later in the same spot. To the south of that tree there were many others, and that part of the ground was practically a jungle. Another Bel tree worth mentioning was on the eastern side of the present Ramakrishna temple. Nowadays on the Public Celebration Day of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday festival an exhibition pavillion is erected. There, where Sri Ramakrishna's big portrait is kept, stood that Bel tree.

On the east of the Pachapukur there were some fruit trees such as mango, palm, nut. etc. A small well was in the courtyard near the present Math building, just to the north of. the jack tree now standing to the southwest of the old shrine building. Near the well there were a palm tree, a bryonia tree, and a jack tree. In

the courtyard also there were many trees like mango, eucalyptus, etc. When the land was purchased there were only two buildings, both one storeyed. The bigger one had two rooms on the northern side and another on the southern, connected by a hall and eastern Verandah. For servants there was another building with three small rooms. There was also a small dilapidated room near the main gate.

As said earlier, the plot of land was secured on March 4, 1898. In the meantime Miss MacLeod, Mrs. Ole Bull, and later Sister Nivedita (then Miss Margaret E. Noble) had reached India and were living with Miss Muller. Soon the first two ladies came to the Math and, getting permission from Swamiji, started living in the larger buildjng of the newly purchased land. The floor of the norhern rooms was pitched. They white-washed the rooms and bought old mahogany furniture, Nivedita used to stay in the southern room, Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull in the northern room facing the river. The other northern room, which is now Swami Abhayanandaji's office, was used as a drawing room, half of which was furnished in Indian style and the other half in Western style.The hall was used as the dining room. They stayed in the house for two months till they left for Kashmir in the first week of May. The Math had been transferred (in February 1898) from Alambazar to Nilambar Mukherji's garden-house which was just a furlong away from the newly purchased land. Swamiji used to come daily to the cottage where his American and English disciples stayed. He would take tea with them and talk for hours on Indian and world history and culture.

Construction

Just after the purchasing of the land Swamiji was eager to prepare it tor the permanent Math. He entrusted Swami Vijnanananda (then Brahmachari Hariprasanna) and Swami Advaitananda with the task of levelling the ground, remodelling the cottage and constructing another building to be used as shrine etc. Recollecting those days Swami Vijnanananda later said :There you see a large field [to the south] in front of the Math-building ; tide-water of the Ganga used to flood this area. There were many pits and ditches. Small ships of the Hore-Milter Company wete being repaired there. When the land was purchased, we levelled it with rubble from the near-by brick factory. We had to take a lot of trouble tor that work. G. T. Road was covered in jungle. People used to get frightened to walk on that road even in daytime. I had to go from Salkia to Serampore, even up to Konnagar, to do all this work.'

At first the courtyard in front of the cottage was levelled, as a new building was to be constructed there. Work started in the month of April 1898. It was

being discussed whether the existing cottage was to be dismantled and a new house constructed on its place or another floor could be erected over the existing cottage. Finally Swami Brahmananda decided to consult a renowned engineer. He came on 14th July and after inspecting the site opined that as the plinth was strong enough, another floor could be constructed on both the sides. Some trees in the courtyard were cut down, work on the foundation for a new building was started, and a new plan prepared to remodel the existing cottage.

On Sunday, November 12, Holy Mother came to Nilambar Babu's garden near the Math, and from there she went to the new site to worship Sri Ramakrishna. But many do not know the actual spot where the Mother performed the worship. From some senior monks we have come to know that the place where Durga Puja was held for the first time at the Math was possibly the spot where the Mother worshipped Sri Ramakrishna. The spot is now just on the western side of Swami Abhayanandaji's office. This information seems correct, according to the present writer, as the shrine (now called the 'old shrine') was being constructed then just near that place.

Another important event took place on December 9, 1898, when Swamiji consecrated the Math at the new site. He came in a procession carrying the *atmaramer kauta* (the vessel containing the relics of Sri Ramakrishna) on his shoulder. What was the actual spot where he worshipped it? We earlier mentioned a Bel tree which was on the eastern side of the existing Sri Ramakrishna temple. Swamiji kept the *kauta* under that Bel tree, worshipped it there and performed *homa.* So, the place is now being used to keep Sri Ramakrishna's big portrait in the exhibition-pavillion on the Public Celebration Day.

Construction work went on at a brisk pace. A platform was built around the Bel tree (now near Swamiji's temple) for the monks to sit on and meditate. Many trees of the southern lawn were cut down as it was decided to hold celebration there, while many trees around the ponds and near the bank of the river were allowed to stand. The monks along with the labourers worked like machines; the shrine-building was constructed in seven months, and remodelling of the Math-building and servants' quarters took less than five months. In a little over eight months (April to December) building construction and remodelling were completed. The courtyard was levelled, though it was not paved as we find it today. During those days the level of the Math ground was much lower than it is now. It was raised by at least 3 or $3_{1/2}$ feet.

In the old building there were four rooms and the eastern verandah on the ground floor. Swami Vijnanananda divided the hall into two rooms and a small

passage. Another room was constructed on the southwest side. A very small room and western verandah were also added. On the northern side a small urinal was constructed near the drain. The staircase for going to the first floor was made of wooden planks. The top floor, which was completely new, had five rooms, but the northern portion was kept as an open terrace. To its north a toilet was constructed. Facing the river a wide balcony and on the west a small baleony were also added. So in all there were twelve rooms after remodelling the old cottage. The remodelled building became the main monastery or Math.

The servants' quarters was not changed much. There were already three rooms. Only a passage was constructed over it connecting the Math-building with the shrine-building.

The first floor of the shrine-building, though renovated in 1970, remains today as it was in 1899. At first the outside steps were of wooden planks. Later Swami Vijnanananda added the inside staircase used for carrying consecrated food. The ground floor was remodelled after many years. Bricks, clay, lime, and *surki* were used in the construction of the buildings as cement was not then available.

Starting of the new Math

On January *2*. 1899, the Math was shifted from Nilambar Babu's. garden to the present site, though some monks and brahmacharis had started living at the new Math from 9 December 1898 the day of consecration. On January 2 Swamiji was at Deoghar from where he returned in the last week of the month. It is now difficult to say who the monks and brahmacharis were then at the Math in January as many were busy in other centres and also in relief operations outside. But of the following members we may he certain— Swamis Brahmananda. Shivananda. Turiyananda, Saradananda. Advaitananda, Premananda, Sadananda, Virajananda, Vimalananda. Nirmalananda. Prakashananda, Godhananda. and Brahmacharis Hariprasanna, Sudhir, Suren. Brojen and Parbhat,

Swamiji lived in the southeastern room of the first floor, which is now kept as a memorial. The adjacent room, where Swami Nirvanananandaji now stays, was the office and library room. Swami Vijnanananda lived in the small room which is now being used as the pantry of Swami Nirvanananandaji. When Swami Vijnanananda left for Allahabad. Swami Subodhananda started staying in that room. The northeastern room, in which Swami Abhayananuaji now lives, was Swami Brahmananda's room. Swamis Shivananda and Premananda both lived in the northwestern room. The rooms on the ground floor were used by other inmates. Swami Turiyananda lived in the room marked 'K' whereas Swamis Advaitananda. Nirmalananda and others lived in the room marked 'B' *(see the*

plan). In the room marked ‘C’ Swamis Atmananda, Shuddhananda, Nirbhayananda. Br. Jnan and others lived. Swami Saradananda, Br. Brojen and others were in the room marked ‘D’ and room ‘F’ was used as the store. Below the staircase there was arrangement for keeping tobacco, lanterns, etc. The room marked ‘A’ was used as a visitors’ mom and also served as a multipurpose room: though guests used to stay there it was also used as a lecture room and music room. Musical instruments like harmonium, pakhwaj. tabla. tanpura, etc. and barbells, dumb-bells and other instruments for physical exercise were kept there. (These instruments for physical exercise are now at the Probationers’ Training Centre for the use of the brahmacharis there.) Except the visitors’ room, in all other rooms there were cots (bedsteads) for the members. Swamiji himself paid twenty rupees to purchase quilts for the brahmacharis.Swami Brahmananda used to keep a pair of dumb-bells and a pair of clubs in his room for his daily exercise, which he used to take after morning meditation, Swami Saradananda used to exercise in the afternoon.

As said earlier, the first floor of the shrine-building now exists as it was constructed, though the ground floor has been remodelled. There were three rooms above, of which the southern room was used as the shrine, while the northern one was used as *sayan-ghar* (bedroom) for Sri Ramakrishna, though the clothes and other things used in the shrine were also kept there. The third room was behind these rooms and was used as a meditation room. There were two rooms on the ground floor—the eastern room was used as refectory, and the western one, which is now a part of the Math-office, was the kitchen. In between these two rooms, there was some space (in later years converted into the present Math-office) which was open with some pillars on the southern side. It was used as a place for dining and also for dressing vegetables.

The floor of the shrine was paved with decorated tiles, and a hanging chandelier was fixed just in front of the altar.

Describing the trees near the Math-building and the river Swamiji wrote to Miss Christine Greenstidel on July 6, 1901:

We have two huge mango trees, one Panas (jack-fruit), and one Nim (margosa), making a beautiful grove just in front of the monastery building. Vnder theni is my favourite place. Fruits are over. We have eaten several thousand, mangoes from these two trees. There are some panases left yet. ... Then our shads are coming up the river. As I am writing, the waves are splashing against the house, and beneath me are hundreds of small fishing boats, all seeking to catch shads. . . . The one thing that is disturbing me is the small steamers continuously going up and down this huge river. They make too much noise.

During those days the river was very near the Math-building. Later the embankment was constructed under the supervision of Swami Vijnanananda, thus driving the river a little further away from the building. Some years later the river moved further away because the embankment was extended further.

Daily life at the Math

It is interesting to note the daily life of the monks and brahmacharis during those days at the Math. A member used to ring the rising bell at 4 a.m. After washing, all the members had to go to the shrine and meditate till six. From 6 to 6.30 almost all used to go to Swami Brahmananda's room where *bhajans* (devotional songs) and spiritual talks by the Swami were held. At 8.30 they had to go to the dining place where on most days *mudi*, (puffed rice) was the only thing for breakfast. Only a few monks used to take tea. Swamiji and one or two senior monks used to sit on a bench in the western verandah of the Math-building to take tea. (That bench is still kept in the same place.) After breakfast all went to attend to their respective duties like office work, dressing vegetable, shrine work, agriculture, etc. The bell for lunch was at twelve noon. Rice, *dal* (lentil soup), and one-vegetable curry constituted the usual fare, though some *chapatis* (unleavened wheat bread) were also served. The *prasad* (consecrated food) consisting of rice, vegetable fries and curries, and *payas* (milk pudding), was served equally among all—everyone getting a little. For the worship of Sri Ramakrishna half-a-seer of rice was allotted which was offered in the shrine at noon. From 12.30 to 2.30 p.m. many used to lake rest, some used to study scriptures in the rooms, and Swamis Premananda and Shivananda used to discuss among themselves the management of the.Math. At 2.30 one of the direct disciples took a scripture class for the brahmacharis and junior monks while the others used to go for their own duties. The class continued till 4. There was no provision for evening tea during those days, but those who liked to take a cup of tea could get it. In the afternoon young monks and brahmacharis like Swami Prakashananda and others used to play football in the southern lawn in front of the Math building. In the evening after *arati* all used to meditate, after which all had to assemble in the visitors' room where *bhajans* and spiritual discussions were held. Swamis Turiyananda, Shivananda. Saradananda and other direct disciples used to answer the questions raised by other members on spiritual and scriptural matters. The supper bell was at 9 p.m. when *chapatis*, a vegetable curry, and/or *dal* were served along with consecrated *payas.* After dinner another scripture class was held in the eastern verandah where one would read till eleven when all retired to sleep. It was said earlier that there were not

many members permanently living at the Math, as monks were needed by other centres and relief operations now and then. Even Swamiji's stay at the Math totalled less than eighteen months between 1899 and 1902. Swami Brahmananda also had to stay in Calcutta for a long time as he was then the President of the Calcutta branch. Among the other direct disciples many used to come to the Math and then again go out to other branches for work. Swami Vijnanananda, the main architect, stayed at the Math permanently till 1900. New boys were also coming at that time to join the monastic order. It is therefore difficult now to say who used to do which work at the Math in those days. Yet we present here a general picture of the allotment of duties at the Math.

Swami Premananda's main duty was in the shrine. He used to do *puja*, assisted by Swamis Atmananda and Nischayananda. When he had to go out for some business Swami Shivananda used to substitute for him. Swami Saradananda used to look after official correspondence, keep accounts, give evening classes for the brahmacharis and junior monks. Swami Turiyananda's duty was to teach meditation and give scripture classes. Swamis Advaitananda and Subodhananda worked in the kitchen-garden. Swami Vijnanananda's duty was general construction. Swami Nirmalananda assisted Swami Saradananda in the office work. Swami Prakashananda was the *bhandari* (store-keeper), Swami Bodhananda and some other junior monks worked in the kitchen-garden, whereas Swami Atmananda worked in the shrine—he had to clean and sweep the three rooms and two verandahs of the first floor in the shrine-building. He also helped the *bhandar* by making *chapatis* both in the morning and evening.Swami Nischayananda used to ring the bell at scheduled times, and worked in the shrine. Swami Virajananda had to serve Swamiji and cook for him. When he went to Mayavati, Swami Achalananda (who was then living at the Math but had not yet taken monastic orders: he became a monk in May 1902) took up Swami Virajananda's duty of attending on Swamiji, which service lasted from morning till ten at night. Swamis Premananda and Shivananda looked after the general management of the Math. Swamiji never interfered in anyone's work. He generally used to give scripture classes in the afternoon and conduct *bhajans* at night after meditation, and also met the visitors. Sister Nivedita, though she was running a school for girls in Calcutta, used to come to the Math twice a week to give talks to the brahmacharis on physiology, botany, the arts (including painting), and the kindergarten system. Swamiji used to give classes on the Vedas, Upanisads, Vedanta-Sutras, Gita, Bhagavata and other scriptures, and had himself taught for a time Panini's *Astadhyayi* (Sanskrit grammar). Swamis Saradananda and Turiyananda used to give evening question-classes, classes for the study of Sanskrit and of Eastern and Western

philosophies. The junior monks and brahmacharis formed themselves into a body and elected a superintendent from among themeselves every month. While Swamis Premananda and Shivananda were responsible for seeing that the daily duties were properly carried out and the needs of the Math attended to. Swamis Brahmananda and Saradananda looked after the organization side. Swami Saradananda held that unless the members, specially the juniors, were given freedom of decision in their sphere, with responsibilities to shoulder, they would never learn to stand on their own feet. Thus he turned his attention seriously to training the brahmacharis. When Swamiji was preparing to go to the West for the second time, Swami Saradunanda wrote in his diary: 'Thinking about the method to be adopted in the Math after S.V.goes. Course of study: History, Phil,Science-language- grammar-exercise and music. One day perfect rest.

Helpers at the Math

The monks and brahmacharis used to do almost all the work at the Math. During the early days there were not any paid workers except the cook and the gardener. Sri Haru Thakur was the first cook. After him Sri Prabhakar Thakur was appointed. He was a good soul and spiritually advanced, for which Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda liked him very much. When any guest came to the Math after lunch-time, Sri Prabhakar Thakur used to offer his meal to the guest, himself being contented with only *chida* (flattened rice). Chakku was the *mali* (gardener), though at night he worked as the gate-keeper also. He was a good wrestler and Swami Brahmananda liked him very much. Sometimes the Swami used to wrestle with him.

Later two more workers were appointed—Sri Ananta Bagdi, who was a helper in many ways, and Sri Rakhal Das, who was a washerman. They both lived outside the Math with their families. Sri Das used to wash clothes in the pond which is now to the north of the Show Room of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha. His son, who later became a doctor, asked his father to give up the job of a washerman, but he did not agree. He said to his son, 'Swamiji asked me to do this job. So, I must do it till I die.'

Monastic members and branch centres

It is difficult to mention the names of all the monks and brahmaeharis of the Ramakrishna Order of those days. The *Udbodhan,* the Bengali journal of the Order, wrote in 1899:

'There were 18-19 youths in the dilapidated house at Baranagar who were waiting for the proper time, having firm faith in God. The number has doubled

by now.' This means that there were more than thirty-five members in 1899. By 1902 the number might have reached fifty. At that time there were all the direct disciples, except Swami Yogananda who passed away in 1899. Besides, Swamis Sadananda, Shuddhananda. Virajananda, Vimalananda, Nirmalananda, Swarupananda, Prakashananda, Bodhananda, Atmananda, Kalyanananda, Nischayananda, Paramananda. Nirbhayananda, Satchidananda (senior) Satchidananda (junior). Dhirananda, Satyakamananda, Sureswarananda, Nityananda, Somananda and others were in the Order. Among the brahmacharis there were Jnan, Nandalal, Brojen, Harendranath (Nadu) and many others. Sister Nivedita was also in the Order.

By July 4, 1902, there were eight branches of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, though the two foreign branches can also be included in the list. Two in Calcutta and one each in Madras, Varanasi, Mayavati, Kankhal. Sargachi, Dacca, New York and California—these ten and the Belur Math, in all eleven centres were in full swing during that time. In Calcutta weekly meetings of the Mission were being held at 57, Ramkanta Basu Street where Swami Saradananda used to go for lectures. When Holy Mother came to Calcutta she would live in a house at Bosepara Lane. Swami Yogananda assisted by Swami Satchidananda (senior) and Br. Krishnalal (later Swami Dhirananda) served her. The girls school run by Sister Nivedita was also considered a non-official branch of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Ramakrishnananda was in charge of the Madras branch. Swamis Sadananda and Paramananda assisted him at different times till 1902. At Varanasi,Swami Shivananda started the Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama on July 4, 1902. The Ramakrishna Home of Service at Varanasi, though in close contact with Belur Math, was not a branch of either the Math or the Mission then. The Kankhal branch was started in June 1901 by Swami Kalyanananda, later assisted by Prakashananda. Swami Akhandananda started the Sargachi Ashrama in 1897. Later Swamis Nityananda and Sureswarananda went there to assist him. At Mayavati there were Swamis Swarupananda, Virajananda, Vimalananda and others. The Dacca branch, though started by Swarnis Virajananda and Prakashananda in 1899, had no monastic members and was then being run by the local devotees. Swami Abhedananda was running the branch in New York and Swami Turiyananda in San Francisco (California). Like the Ramakrishna Home of Service at Varanasi, the Brahmavadin Club in Allahabad, the Vedanta Society at Lilsoor (near Bangalore) and some other organizations were in close touch with the monks of the Ramakrishna Order till Swamiji's passing away.

The names of the Monks and brahmacharis at Belur Math in January 1899 were mentioned earlier. It was also said that all of them did not stay there permanently as they had to go for relief work and to other centres frequently. But

some of them stayed almost permanently till Swamiji's passing away. Among them we may name Swamis Premananda, Advaitananda. Saradananda. Atmananda, Bodhananda, Nischayananda. Nirmalananda and Brahmacharis Nandalal, Brojen, and Harendranath.

From 1899 to 1901, large-scale relief operations were conducted in six places, though small-scale relief was a regular feature In 1899 flood-relief was conducted at Ghogra (Bihar), land-slide relief in Darjeeling (Bengal), plague-relief in Calcutta, and famine-relief at Kishengarh (Rajputana). Next year famine-relief was conducted at Kishengarh (Rajputana) and Khandwa (Central Provinces), flood-relief at Behala-Bishnupur (Bengal) and plague-relief in Calcutta. In 1897, Swamis Akhandananda, Tigunatitananda, Virajananda, and Prakashananda had conducted famine-relief operations at Murshidabad, Dinajpur, Deoghar and Dakshineswar respectively. In 1899-1900 Swamis Kalyanananda, Atmananda, Nirmalananda, and Br, Brojen worked at Kishengarh, which ultimately gave birth to an orphanage accommodating fifty boys and twenty girls. Swamis Sureswarananda (then Br. Suren) and Nityananda were sent by Swamiji to Murshidabad to help Swami Akhandananda. In the plague-relief work in Calcutta Swamis Shivananda, Sadananda, Nityananda, Atmananda. and Sister Nivedita performed a miracle. It may be mentioned here that Sri Yatindra Nath Mukherji, who later became a revolutionary and died of the injuries incurred while challenging the British soldiers in a gun-battle in Orissa, was also a member of the volunteer party in that plague-relief, and thus became well known to Sister Nivedita and Swamiji. (Sri Mukherji, then a young boy, was famous as 'Bagha Jatin' as he had killed a tiger in a direct fight open handed).

These frequent relief operations, extensive preaching, and the branches of the Belur Math needed many monks and brahmacharis. For this reason there were not many members staying permanently at the Math, which sometimes caused difficulties in running the Math efficiently. Moreover, during those days the Belur village was malarial, and many members used to fall ill frequently.

The Students' Home at the Math

Swamiji started a sort of Students' Home at the Math in 1900. There were six boys. Staying at the Math, they used to read at the schools of Bally and Calcutta. Of those boys we now know the names of only three: Gour, Nadu, and Kheda. Gour's age was sixteen in the year 1900, Nadu was about eighteen, and Kheda was only eight; Swamiji liked Gour and Nadu very much and used to call them his 'Nandi-Bhringi, 'Tal-Betal' or 'Humpty-Dumpty'.These two boys served

Swamiji till his last days, and with them

Swamiji used to clean the drains or milk the goats. When he went to Bodh Gaya and Varanasi, he took Gour and Nadu with him. One night at the Math, when Swamiji heard the cry of a kid he suspected that some thief had come. He called Gour and Nadu to go with him with a chopper to face the thief. Another day a boy of the Home stole some coins from the Math office. Swami Brahmananda was furious at this, but Swamiji saved the boy saying, "Well Raja, for a child this is mischief but not a crime. From Tomorrow please give them some money so that in their school they may buy nuts or *dalmut* and have a good time.' The boys of the Home used to live with the monks. Gour and Nadu lived in the office room just by the side of Swamiji's room. The boys were under the supervision of Swami Shuddhananda. One of them entered monastic life later.

During Swamiji's time there was no protected water supply at the Math. So the members used to collect water twice a month (generally on the tenth lunar day) from the Ganga. There were eight huge tubs under the trees in the courtyard. The members used to stand in a line and collect water from the Ganga to fill them up. After a day or two when the sediment settled, the water was collected from a tub and kept in a pitcher which served as a homemade filter containing sand, alum, etc. Thus only clear and filtered water was used for cooking and drinking. As Swamiji's health needed better drinking water, Swami Bodhananda used to go to Baranagar on the other bank of the river, to get tap-water for him. For the members, drinking water was collected from the Golpukur and also from the well. Water for use in the toilet was kept in a big tub. As there were not many members staying permanently at the Math, the students and young devotees who used to come there also helped the members in collecting water from the river. Br. Jnan with the help of these students used to sweep and clean the Math grounds.

During those days, general marketing for the Math was done at Belur Bazar. In the Belur village there was a grocery shop run by a gentleman named Tinkari. His shop was on the northwest of the Math campus. Rice, *da!,* spices, *mudi,* and other groceries for the Math were bought from his shop. Vegetables were grown in the kitchen-garden of the Math. But sometimes it so happened that there were no vegetables to be had there. Then Swami Premananda used to send some brahmacharis to Baranagar telling them, 'You all go to Narayan, Bhuvan, and Bhusan. Tell them that I have sent you for vegetables.' These three gentlemen were very much devoted to the Swami and whenever he sent anyone'to them, they used to send a boatful of vegetables for the Math. Nowadays monks and brahmacharis of the Math chant at the beginning of lunch or dinner the Gita verse beginning with *brahmarpanam,* and after the meal is over they say *jay* to

Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji, and the Ganga. But it was not so during the early days. The members used to come for food and go without any chanting. It was Swami Shuddhananda who introduced the custom of saying *jay* after the meal. Later the chanting of the Gita verse was also added before the meal. During the meals in those days the members used to chant many Sanskrit verses from the scriptures, sometimes even Bengali couplets.

During the early days there was no cow at the Math, the first being bought in 1901. Swami Nischayananda and another monk were sent by Swamiji to a milkman at Ariadaha, near Dakshineswar, for that purpose. When they were returning with the cow by boat the cow took fright and jumped into the river. Swami Nischayananda, with the cow's rope in his hand, also jumped and swam with the cow for a long distance until near Salkia when he succeeded in taking the cow to the bank. Later some more cows were added to the monastic dairy. Besides, there were some dogs, swans, goats, a crane, and a deer. There was a kid goat also. Swamiji named the she-goat Hansi, and the kid Matroo. He tied a small bell round its neck. He was very fond of those birds and animals, and used to play with Matroo. Matroo also liked Swamiji very much and would go to Swamiji's room and sit on his chair. Sometimes Swamiji himself used to milk the goat. Sometimes he had to experiment to find cures when the animals or birds fell sick.

There were three dogs—Bagha, Mary and Lily. Bagha was an ordinary street dog which was brought to the Math as a puppy by Haru Thakur, the cook. It had some noteworthy characteristics. Whenever any foreigner came to the Math, it received him at the gate, moved with him wherever he went, and lastly used to see him off at the gate. If any member needed to go to the toilet at night, Bagha would accompany him, as the place on the western side of the Math was full of bushes, trees and poisonous snakes. It used to lead him to the toilet, enter first to see if there was any snake, and finding it safe would allow the member to enter. When food was served for the dogs, Bagha used to wait till Mary and Lily finished their food before it would eat. During the early days there was no separate guest-house for foreign visitors, so they had to stay in tents in the Math campus. At night Bagha used to sleep near the tents and guard the guests. After its death Bagha was buried under a sandal-wood tree on the Math grounds.

More about those days

From October 1901 to January 1902 many *Pujas* were held at the Math. First there was Durga Puja and then LaksmI Puja, Kali Puja and Saraswati Puja, all

being conducted in clay images. A description of the first Durga Puja can be found in the *Life of Swami Vivekananda* and other books. Here let us present some less known and unknown incidents regarding it. In the courtyard between the shrine-building and Math-building a temporary *pandal* (pavillion) was put up where the image was installed for worship. The image faced west. The *Pandal* extended up to the mango tree which still stands in the courtyard, and the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna sat there. The devotees had their *Prasada* in the northwestern portion of the courtyard, in the space between the existing jackfruit tree and Ramakrishna temple. Brahmachari Krishnalal did the *puja.* He was tall, of fair complexion, his voice very soft and his behaviour with others very polite. Sri Ishwarchandra Chakrabarti, the father of Swami Ramakrishnananda, was the *tantra-dharaka,* that is the main helper of the priest. He was strongly built and was an adept in Japa and the Tantra. Some years later Swami Saradananda practised *tantra-sadhana* under his guidance.One day during the first Durga Puja at the Math there was *yatra (*Indian drama) performance named *Nala-Damayanti.* In a letter dated 12th November 1901, Swamiji wrote to Miss Christine Greenstidel :

We had grand Pujas (worship) here in our Math this year. The biggest of our Pujas is the Mother-worship lasting nearly four days and nights. We brought a clay image of Mother with ten hands standing with one foot on a lion, the other on a demon. Her two daughters, the goddess of learning and music, on either side on lotuses ; beneath, her two sons—the god of war and that of wisdom.

Thousands of people were entertained ; but I could not see the Puja alas! I was down with high fever all the time. Day before yesterday, however, came the Puja of Kali. We had an image too and sacrificed a goat and burned a lot of fireworks.

It may be mentioned here that the Durga Puja in clay image was held at the Math first in 1901. Later from 1902 to 1911 the puja was held in *ghat-pat*—in a special, sanctified pitcher and picture. Again in 1912 when a devotee promised to give the required money to buy a clay image, the puja was held in image.

On Febrary 10, 1901. the first General Meeting of the trustees of the Math was held at Belur Math to elect the office-bearers. Swamiji handed over the property and responsibility to the trustees. Only the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna constituted the trust-board ; to avoid legal complication Swamiji did not choose any of his own disciples as a trustee. The first trust-board was constituted by eleven monks—

Swamis Advaitananda, Brahmananda, Shivananda, Premananda, Saradananda,

Akhandananda, Trigunatitananda, Ramakrishnananda, Subodhananda, Abhedananda and Turiyananda. Swami Adbhutananda did not agree to be a trustee. As a true democrat Swamiji never dictated to any of his brother-monks, rather he introduced the system of voting through ballot papers in selecting the office-bearers. The Proceedings Book recorded :

FIRST MEETING : FEBRUARY 10, 1901

BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

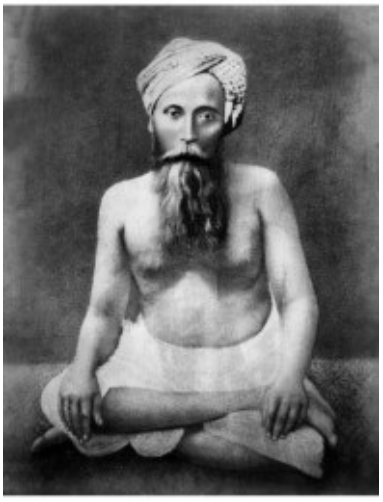
The first general meeting of the Chartered Trustees of the Belur Math-Thakurbari, was held in the Math premises on February 10. 1901, four days after the property was made over to the Trustees by the due registration of the Deed by the Swami Vivekananda at the Howrah Registrar's Court on February 6, 1901. Eight of the eleven trustees were present on the occasion...

As we know, during the above-mentioned meeting Swami Ramakrishnananda was in Madras and Swami Abhedananda and Turiyananda were in the U.S.A. ; hence they could not participate. But the other eight members were present. Swami Advaitananda, being the senior-most trustee, presided over the meeting. Three names were suggested for the office of President—Swamis Brahmananda, Saradananda, and Ramakrishnananda. Votes were taken and Swami Brahmananda was elected President for two years. He secured 5 votes whereas Swamis Ramakrishnananda and Saradananda got 2 and 1 votes respectively.

The Proceedings Book further recorded :

The Swami Premananda then proposed that the Swami Saradananda be elected as the Secretary and the Swami Nirmalananda the Assistant Secretary for the Math. The Swami Trigunatita [nanda] seconded the proposal, and it was unanimously carried.

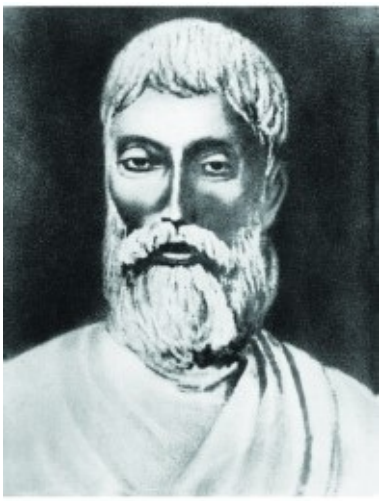
Swami Nirmalananda later declined to accept the post.



Balaram Basu

Girish Chandra Ghosh

Ramchandra Dutta



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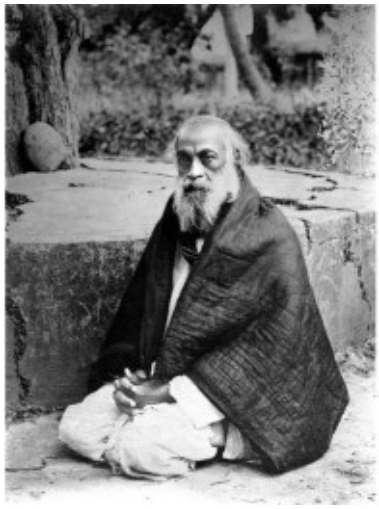

Mahendarnath Gupta (Master Mahashay)

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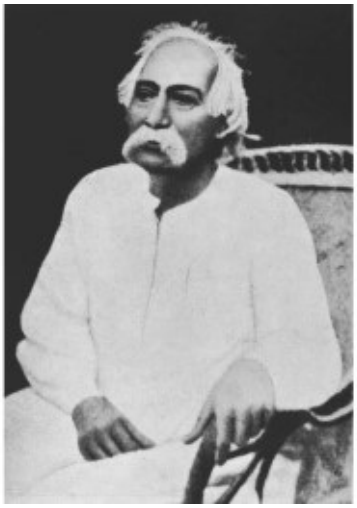
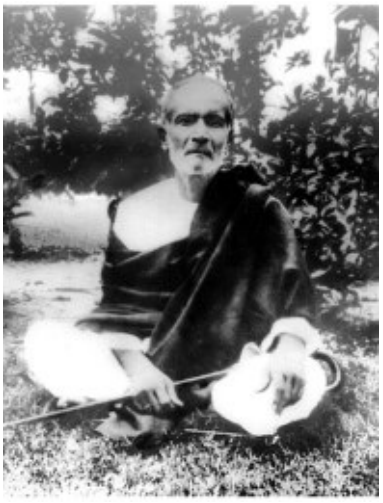


Dr Mahendralal Sarkar



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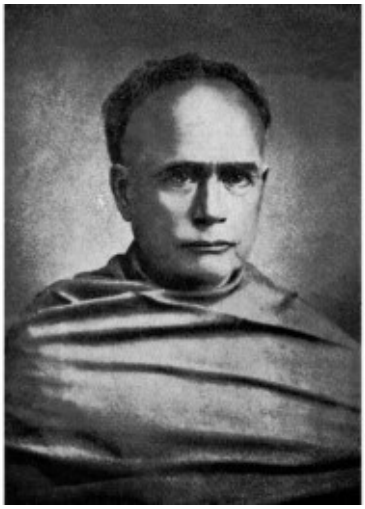

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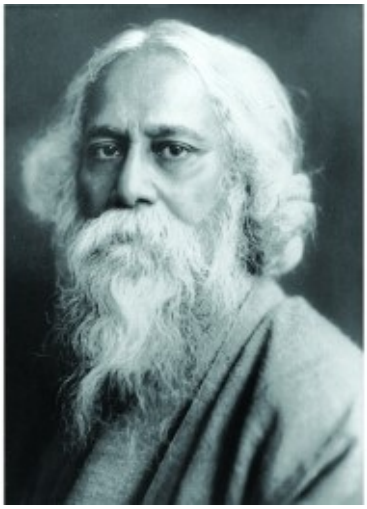
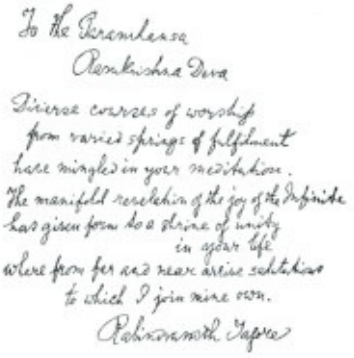
Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay



Rabindranath Tagore and his eulogy to Sri Ramakrishna


To the Paramhansa
Ramkrishna Deva
Diverse courses of worship
from varied springs of fulfilment
have mingled in your meditation.
The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite
has given form to a shrine of unity
in your life
where from far and near arrive salutations
to which I join mine own.
Rabindranath Tagore

IN PUBLIC EYES

NEWSPAPER REPORTS

[The *Indian Mirror,* 28 March 1875]

A HINDU SAINT— We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The neverceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of his mind are the very opposite to those of Pandit Dayananda Saraswati, the former being so gentle tender and contemplative, as the latter is sturdy, masculine, and polemical. Hinduism must have in it a deep sense of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these. .

[The *Indian Mirror,* 20 February 1876]

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ - Ramakrishna, A Hindu devotee known as a Paramahamsa, now living at Dakshineswar, is a remarkable man, and appears to have attained an extraordinary elevation of moral character and spirituality. Several Brahmo missionaries who have visited him from time to time speak highly of his devotion and purity and his deep insight into the realities of the inner world. Though a true Hindu he is said to sympathize heartily with the Brahmos of the advanced schools.

[The *Indian Mirror,* 11 February 1877]

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ - Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a Hindu devotee of a very unusual type, who has sympathy with our movement, now and then has interviews with our leaders. His physical condition being very debilitated and his heart susceptible of strong religious impulses he cannot bear the pressure of feelings and often becomes unconscious and is subject to cataleptic fits.

[The *Indian Mirror,* 15 June 1879]

A VISIT TO THE YOGI OF DAKSHINESHWAR— Ramakrishna is not educated in the English sense of the term. His views may be anything but pleasant to hear and his notions of gallantry or propriety are such as will probably shock the fastidious tastes of Western critics. I can assure the reader, however, if the Yogi is not gallant is pure. If there is not warmth in his feelings

about a woman, the place which he assigns her in the kingdom of God is far higher than any which the passions of men might reach. Our good hermit thinks that any extended scale of devotion or communion is impossible so long as there is lust to distract or a woman to seduce the heart from the way of heaven. Every devotee should be absolutely proof against any influence of the kind. In that the mind being free from every sort of distracting influence, may proceed uninterruptedly to its earnest search of the Almighty : but how to be thus free, how to be proof against lust?

The method is to resort to the most violent pains for the purpose of extinguishing lust. If I am asked to state my opinion as to whether the mode alluded to is practicable or beneficial I shall say that I do not know. For surely it has been feasible in one or two cases, or why was it resorted to at all? But to enforce it as a rule in all cases would be the height of absurdity. The same remark perfectly applies to Sri Ramakrishna's method. But let us see what it is. I have to only recall the figure used in my last letter, viz. that the door-keeper at the mansion of heaven is a woman ; now in what way is one to overcome the superior power of this being? Sri Ramakrishna says there are three ways of doing it.

The first is what is called the "heroic" method — and its principle is the defeat of sin brought on by indulgence in sin. Let a man go straight to the door-keeper and attain satiety and complete reaction by indulging in every sort of sexual pleasure. This is the most hideous principle which depraved imagination has invented for the purification of the heart. Yet it is a melancholy fact that hundreds, thousands of depraved men and women are pursuing this suicidal course at the time of the day.

The second method consists in assuming the female nature. If a man puts on a woman's dress, imitates her manners and cultivates the tenderest feelings of female nature and in this way forgets his own manhood, verily he cannot look on woman with evil eyes. He greets her as his handmaid and in this way gets access to heaven.

The third is called the "filial" method and it means that the devotee is to learn to call a woman by the name of Mother; for if he is a son he cannot possibly commit lust in his heart. Now this may appear to most readers as transcending God's evident intentions and violating nature's beneficent laws. But the fact is there. Ramakrishna owes much of his success to the last mentioned method. The trial and temptations which he voluntarily underwent are marvellous to those who : "since it is hard to combat learn to fly." He was tempted in a hundred different ways— but from every blast of the furnace he came out and shone as the purest and brilliant metal.

[The *Sunday Mirror, 2* November 1879]

EDITORIAL NOTES.— The Paramhansa of Dukhinessur, to whose hermitage we paid a visit on the occasion of the moonlight festival, completely lost his senses when he heard the procession chant the name of God before him. This is what we all being intoxicated or maddened by communion with God. The very sight of a man showing his love to Hari renders him literally insensible with joy. The sight we saw there is worth seeing by all means.

[The *New Dispensation,* 26 May 1881]

Sadhu Sanga ; or the companionship of saints and devotees, is justly regarded as one of the essential means of sanctification, and we are gratified to find among our brethren a desire to avail themselves of such means whenever an opportunity presents itself. Dayananda Saraswati, the great Vedic reformer, the Paramhansa of Dakhineswar, the Shikh Nagaji of Doomraon and the Pahari Baba of Ghazipur are, so far as we know, the four distinguished ascetic saints whom our friends have from time to time duly honored, and in whose company they have sought the sanctifying influences of character and example. May we respect and serve with profound reverence and humility every ascetic saint whom Providence may bring unto us ! The impure become pure in the company of *Sadhus.*

There was a large gathering of our friends at Dakhineswar, on Tuesday last, to pay their respects to the Venerable Paramhansa. The party proceeded in a steamer, and reached the place at about 5-30 P.M. Others had assembled earlier. Altogether there were more than eighty persons present. The conversation, which was deeply spiritual and instructive, lasted over an hour, and was followed by hymns chanted by our Singing Apostle. As the shades of the evening gathered, the garden and the river side looked most romantic and charming, and eminently fitted for devotion. The party returned, some in carriages, some by rail on the other side of the river, while the rest walked all the distance. It was a pleasant evening, and showed how highly the Paramhansa is esteemed by all classes of the Native community. His liberality is indeed a great attraction. One of the most noteworthy things he said the other day was that he believed in the identify of Janak and Nanac. After the death of the former the Lord blessed his spirit, and expressed his joyful appreciation of the Rishi’s life. Greatly pleased, he said to him to the following effect, ‘Well done, good Rishi. Thou hast sanctified many by thy purity and asceticism, and by the noble example of a self-denying king thou hast set. So good a teacher, thou shalt not sleep in heaven but thou shalt go again into the world. Thy services, O Janak, are required in the

Punjab. Go there, harmonize the scriptures, and draw together hostile sects. O thou apostle of union and reconciliation." In this anecdote one cannot fail to notice the doctrine of unity which forms the corner-stone of the New Dispensation.

[The *New Dispensation, 7* July 1881]

In the course of an animated conversation with our devotees, the Paramhansa of Dakhineswar lately expounded the Hindu doctrine of Trinity. He spoke of "Bhagaban", "Bhagavat" and "Bhakta" as three entities, yet one in essence,—the mysterious three in one. The first signifies the Godhead; the second, Scripture or Word, the third, Devotee or Saint.

[The *New Dispensation,* 9 September 1881]

LESSONS GATHERED.-THAT beloved child of God, and child-like, the Paramhansa of Dakhineswar, honored the minister's Asram with another visit, on Tuesday last, and, as usual, spoke wisdom and love, sang and danced with joy. Rich and varied were the illustrations which he used. Some of these we shall cite for the reader's benefit. (1) The young lady in the house is kept employed in all manner of household drudgery from morning till night, and has no rest. When she is about to become a mother she is gradually relieved of all work, and is allowed to remain quiet. When the child is born, she not only manifests a distaste for work, but she day and night does little besides caressing and kissing the little baby, and finds happiness in it alone. So the soul works and seeks salvation in work. But as soon as it becomes fruitful it gives up all outward work. When true wisdom is born, there is an end to the religion of dry work and the soul rejoices in wisdom, the fruit of all spiritual culture. (2) The hidden magnet in the depths of the sea suddenly loosens all the iron nails and screws of the vessel, and at once it breaks into pieces and is lost. So by true wisdom the bonds and chains of the vessel of life, selfishness, pride, lust, anger etc., are instantaneously cut, and the solid mass so well fastened melts away in Divine love and resignation. (3) *Ego* is no substance. It is only coating over coating, like onion. Remove the coats one after another, and you see nothing is left. So by stripping humanity of its outer and inner coat you find nothing left of man. What remains is Divinity. By unfolding self I find Him. (4) All, all is Narayan or Divinity, said the Guru to the disciple, and the latter blindly accepted the doctrine. A big elephant led by its *mahut* or driver was passing through the streets; the disciple happening to come in the way, the driver warned him to move, but in spite of repeated warnings he persisted in standing unmoved where he was. At last the huge animal moved on, took the man by the trunk, and flung him away. He was bruised and hurt, and he

argued within himself,— : “How can this be? I am Narayan, the elephant too is Narayan. How can the two clash? Why should I come to grief by following the Narayan in me? Let me go to my Guru.” On his representing fully what had happened, the Guru remarked,— “You must remember, as I said to you, that all is Narayan. Self-Narayan and Elephant-Narayan, you do well to acknowledge, but why deny the Mahut-Narayan? Did he not dissuade you and give you timely warning? You have come to grief because you disregarded his warning.”

[The *Indian Mirror,* 9 October 1881]

EDITORIAL NOTES—Friday was the day set apart for our Autumnal festival. So we went to Dakshineswar to pass a few hours in a friendly talk with the good Paramahansa with whom our readers have become probably quite familiar by this time. More than fifty gentlemen were present on the occasion. The first thing that as usual edified us was the sight of this holy person in a trance. Ramakrishna is a man marvellously susceptible of religious impressions and whenever he hears somebody speak lovingly and genuinely of the Lord, he is so much moved that he cannot contain himself and much against his own will is literally lost in rapture of his emotional pleasures. He loves our minister and whenever we accompany the latter to Dakshineswar on a visit to the good man, the first thing that greets our eyes is a profound, respectful sincere and affectionate bow on each side and then the complete immersion of the saint in a few minutes trance. That is the work of *love.* He regains his consciousness little by little and when he is half awake begins the conversation as edifying in its nature as it is marked by all the humour and humility that characterizes a genuine son of God. One thing is remarkable about his discourses. He never states many propositions, but the largest portion of what he says is taken up with illustrations. And what illustrations they are ! Facts drawn from the commonest incidents of life, familiar sights and commonplace details are combined and enlarged upon with such infinite sagacity and humour as suffice to suggest, as soon as you have taken your seat before him for a few minutes, that you are before no ordinary person. The subject of our talk on Friday last was the renunciation of self— a topic which he always likes to descant upon. Two obstacles, according to him, lie in the path of spiritual regeneration— the love of woman and the love of money, and on this day he discussed whether it was possible for a regenerated man to live in the world and yet be above it. Those who affect piety are not necessarily above the world, for like vultures and kites they soar very high, heavenward as they pressume and yet their hearts are towards the drains and ditches where lie the carcasses they feed upon. But one who is freed from seir remains in the world like a cord that is burnt: the

similitude of the cord is seen, but the least wind disperses the ashes, like the boiled paddy that seems like the grain and is yet unable to produce other grain; in other words the liberated soul moves about in its affairs, and retains every semblance of the ego, and yet it is not in reality the ego, but something above it. It is possible for such a soul to remain here in activity and yet be unsullied and unaffected by the passing impurities, as it is possible for a flint stone to remain immersed in water and when brought out, to give the same sparks of fire that came from it when it had not touched water. The flint does not lose its fire by being immersed, and so the liberated soul does not lose its heavenly warmth even when it is compelled to touch the impurities of the world.

[The *New Dispensation,* 14 October 1881]

THE vulture, says the Paramhansa, soars high, but its heart is where the putrid carcass lies. So the carnal man may soar ever so high in imagination; his heart still grovels in the mire of impurity and filth.

[The *New Dispensation,* 8 January 1882]

HOPEFUL SIGNS.—THOSE who have watched the later phases of religious thought and life in Calcutta must have been struck to find how the venerable Paramhansa of Dakhineswar is serving as a marvellous connecting link between the Hindus and the Brahmos of the New Dispensation. There have been a series of religious meetings of late in the houses of respectable Hindus, in which the representatives of the two communities were harmoniously blended together so as to form a unity of thought and devotion, which was alike striking and interesting. The proceedings of these meetings generally embrace hymns and discourses by the Paramhansa, questions and answers, and kirtan of a most enthusiastic character. Ladies of high caste Hindu families congregate behind the *purdah* in the upper veranda, and listen with the deepest interest. Learned pandits, educated youths, orthodox Vaishnavas and yogis gather in numbers, some from curiosity, some for the sake of *Sadhu Sanga* or good company, others for acquiring wisdom and joining the kirtan. We have invariably found on such occasions an outburst of living devotional enthusiasm—a mighty wave of rapturous excitement—sweeping over the whole audience. The effect is wonderful. Theological differences are lost in the surging wave of love and rapture. What this spiritual fusion and loving union may lead to in the end who can divine? The ways of the Lord are past finding out.

On Thursday last there was an interesting excursion by a steam launch up the river to Dakhinashwar. The Re. Joseph Cook, Miss Pigot, and the apostles of the New Dispensation together with a number of our young men embarked at about

11 o'clock. The revered Paramhansa of Dakshineswar, as soon as he heard of the arrival of the party, came to the riverside, and was taken on board. He successively went through all the phases of spiritual excitement which characterizes him. Passing through a long interval of unconsciousness he prayed, sang, and discoursed on spiritual subjects. Mr. Cook watched him very closely, and seemed much interested by what he saw. Mr. Cook represented the extreme culture of Christian theology and thought. The Paramhansa represented the extreme culture of Indian Yoga and Bhakti in short the traditional piety of the East. And the apostles of the Brahmo Somaj in bringing together the two proved that the combined both in the all-inclusive harmony of the New Dispensation.

That great devotee the Paramhansa of Dakhineshwar had another long interview with the minister and his friends at Lily Cottage whither he had been invited on 21st instant. The Paramhansa, though he could not be much over forty-two, looked more aged than he did the last time he was seen. His singular merits suffer no diminution, but greater maturity with the progress of time. Simple as a child, yet sensible and shrewd, he loses nothing of the utter inebriation of God's love. He has a strange attraction for every class of Brahmos, who flock to enjoy his communion wherever he goes.

[The *New Dispensation, 3* September 1882]

TWO GREAT MINDS.—The venerable Paramhansa lately paid a visit to the eminent philanthropist and scholar, Vidyasagar. Why did he call ? What earthly or unearthly advantage did that recluse expect from such a visit ? The Paramhansa has a passion for great minds? His curiosity to see distinguished men is most ardent. He is ever asking his friends to show him great things, and in this he is at times most importunate. Now he is off to see a lion. Now his heart is bent on witnessing steam force as it propels a steam launch up the river. He is impatient to have a look at a cathedral with its prayerful thousands. And as among beasts and things inanimate he would honor the great, so also among the human species. Curiosity alone, deep and impulsive, led the devotee of Dakhineswar to Vidyasagar's house in Calcutta. No prospect of earthly good actuated him.

Eminent sage, said the devotee, I come as a little muddy stream into the vast deep sea ['sagar.']

Yes, replied Vidyasagar, but you must remember, venerated sire; that the sea is full of salt water, and if a fresh water stream mixes with it, it too becomes salt, and loses all its sweetness.

It is not *avidya* sagar, which indeed is to be shunned, but *vidya* sagar that draws me into its welcome waters;—was the rejoinder.

But the sea hath its dangers and perils, said Vidyasagar, and thousands of monsters hide themselves in its treacherous waters.

Are there not pearls in the deep water of the sea? In search of those pearls I am here. The sea is famous for its hidden treasures. Great is your value, Vidyasagar. So said Paramhansa.

[The *Indian Mirror,* 26 July 1884]

The venerable Paramhansa Ram Kissen of Dakhineswar paid a visit to Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachuramani on Friday week last. In the course of conversation the Pandit asked the Paramhansa's opinion about the caste system—whether it ought to be abolished or not, the Paramhansa replied— "When the fruit is ripe it falls from the tree of itself. To wrench the unripe fruit is not good."

[The *Indian Mirror,* 19 August 1886]

THE LATE RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA-The much respected Ramakrishna Paramahansa of Dakhineswar who was ailing for some months past from scrofula, breathed his last at about 1 A.M. on Sunday, the 15th instant. The disease had gradually undermined his health, but it was not espected that the end would come so soon. On the day in question, he had taken his evening meal, and had, as usual, retired to bed. A song which was being sung by some of his attendants awoke him and he joined with them, but a short while after they did not hear his voice, and thought that he had as was his wont gone into ecstasy (Samadhi). As, however, he continued in this state for a somewhat longer time than usual, they touched his body and felt his pulse, when it was found that he had ceased to breathe and was no longer living. The very evening he had asked one of the medical men who visited him, whether his disease was a curable one, but having received no satisfactory reply he was heard to say that he was prepared to die any moment.

The next evening his body was removed to the burning ghat at Cossipore. the funeral procession was followed by a large number of his followers, friends and admirers who had hastened to the spot to have last look at his face. The party entered the ghat chanting hymns in praise of Hari. The cot containing the body was then laid down on the side of the river and all the men sat down on the bare ground, forming a circle around the dead body. Babu Troylokhya Nath Sanyal the singing minister of the Brahmos, sang a few songs suited to the occasion. After the songs had softened to some extent the hearts of the sorrowing multitude, the body was placed on the funeral pyre and in an hour and a half the burning was complete. A few bones only were taken to be interred at a suitable spot.

Ramakrishna began life as a priest in one of the shrines at Dakhineswar. Here he practised devotion, yoga and austerities, such as is customary with Hindu devotees. The outcome of all this was a religion which is as liberal as possible. Ramakrishna combined in his own person a Hindu, a Mohammedan and a Christian. In fact, he made no distinction of castes and creeds and his constant wish was that the followers of all religions, being freed from mutual jealousies, would all unite in brotherly love, and sing in praise of the Almighty. He was an unlettered man, but his commonsense was strong and his power of observation keen. He had facility for expressing his ideas in such homely language that he could make himself easily understood by all on intricate points of religion and morality. His childlike simplicity and outspokenness, his deep religious fervour and self-denial, his genial and sympathetic nature and his meek and unassuming manners won the hearts of those who came in contact with him, and music from his lips had a peculiar charm on those who heard him sing. Among others the late Babu Keshab Chandra Sen was very fond of his company and used to spend hours with him in religious conversation. The most remarkable feature in his life was that he succeeded in reforming the character of some young men whose morals were very corrupt. Graduates and undergraduates vied with one another in becoming his followers and many of them have already renounced the world and have adopted the life of ascetics. During the last few months of his illness, it was a touching scene to see the tender care and love with which these young men attended him day and night. Now that he is no more, may the spirit of love and kindness and the high moral tone which he has imparted last for ever, and bear golden fruits.

[The *Indian Mirror,* 21 August 1886]

Ramkrishna Bhuttacharji, better known in the Hindu community as Paramahamsa of Dakhineswar, was born on the 10th of Falgoon, 1834, at Sripore, Kamar Puker in the District of Burdwan. His father Khuderam Bhuttacharji, was a devout Brahmin and in all respects a true Hindu. On the young Ramakrishna the qualities of his parents must have exercised more that usual influence. A peculiarly religious temper seems to have taken powerful hold of his mind and it continued the ruling principle through life. In his 12th year he came to Calcutta with his eldest brother Rameswar Bhuttacharji and lived in Jhamapukur, where the latter founded *a chutushpaty* or a school for Brahminical learning. Here Paramahamsa continued his studies in Sanskrit for some time. Paramahamsa always deprecated Brahminical learning which, he said, instead of making a man religious, only secured him an oblation of rice and plantain. But though not distinguished for scholarship, Paramahamsa had a gift of strong

commonsense and quick apprehension. He could argue learnedly with the most erudite Pandits of the day and understand and explain the most abstruse passages of the Sanskrit scripture. In 1852 the stupendous temples of Dakshineswar were founded by the late Rani Rashmoni. Paramahamsa's eldest brother Rameswar Bhuttacharji was appointed priest of the temple of Kali. After his death Paramahamsa succeeded to his office. He did not hold it for a long time, but resigned it for higher devotional exercises. The acquaintance which he here formed with Hindu ascetics of various denominations, seems to have caused a considerable diversion in his religious opinions. The teachings of these Yogis had an abiding effect on his whole life. From this time he secluded himself entirely from the world and passed his days in prayer and contemplation in an obscure corner on the riverside of the temple garden. This place known as Panchvati is held in sacred veneration by many of his followers. Here

"Remote from man, with
God the passed his days
Prayer all his business, all his
Pleasure praise."

The great doctrine of his religion was renouncement of Kamini-Kanchan, that is, humanities and wealth. The late Paramahamsa was held in the highest respect by all sections of Hindu community. The educated Hindus appreciated his teachings highly and among his followers were many graduates and undergraduates of the University. The great Brahmo leader, the late Babu Keshab Chandra Sen had a profound love and respect for him. If faith, love, self sacrifice, purity of character and entire resignation to the will of the Almighty be the cheif qualifications of a religious man, they found their highest perfection in him and the veneration of the people was not misplaced. (Reprinted from the *Englishman.)*

[The *Indian Mirror,* 10 September 1886]

With the exception of a few people in and around the city, Paramahamsa Ramakrishna was not much known in the country. But he was a devotee of the true type. Born of a poor Brahmin family in Jahanabad in the Hooghly district, Ramakrishna was not fortunate in receiving a good education, secular or spiritual, in his younger days. When he grew up to be a man, his brother, who was a priest, brought him down to Calcutta to relieve him of his priestly duties, but Ramakrishna was averse to this as he always entertained a feeling of intense hatred towards the so-called Brahmin priests. A few years after, his brother died and he was induced by his friends and relations to fill the place of his brother for the support of his family, which he did with great reluctance. At last,

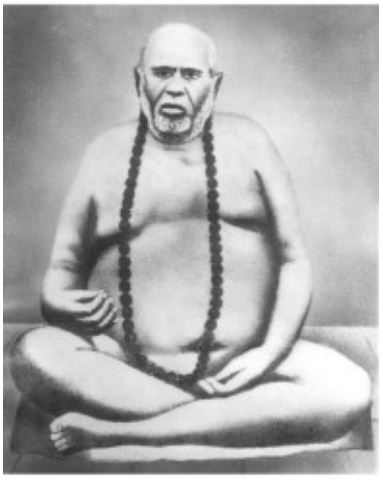
Ramakrishna was relieved by a nephew of his, and he commenced to pave the path for his journey to the happy land. Days and nights, weeks and months, he passed on the banks of the holy Ganges, meditating and communing with the supreme being whom he styled by the name Divine Mother. Ramakrishna's divine exercises became gradually so strong that when he performed it he used to lose all external sensibility. I had the good fortune of seeing him and conversing with him many a time, and I had been out of humour to see him performing the exercises when his body used to become void of animation. Anyone who touched at that time his body, found it to be as stiff as a plank. Mr. Cooke, the American evangelist, who came to this country a few years ago, once witnessed Ramakrishna's divine exercises and he expressed his great surprise at it and remarked that he was not aware before that a man could become so much immersed in divine spirit as to lose all perception of the external world. It is about ten or twelve years since the late Babu Keshab Chandra Sen found Ramakrishna out, and from that time he came to be known to some persons, Ramakrishna was very fond of Keshab Chandra Sen and before his death, he expressed his desire to pass the remaining days of his life in the sanctuary at the Lily Cottage, the residence of the departed Brahmo leader. Ramakrishna in his habits was simple and unassuming. He had a peculiar facility in expressing deep spiritual truths in homely and impressive language. All sections of the community mourn his loss. The other day his ashes were buried in the garden house of one of his disciples, on which occasion hundreds of educated persons were present. A procession of several graduates and undergraduates of our University was formed when the ashes were conveyed to the garden house.

Surendranath Mitra

Ashwini Kumar Dutta

Jadu Mallick

Jaygopal Sen



Trailanga Swami

Dayananda Saraswati

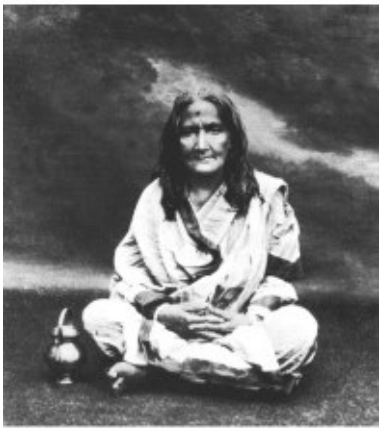
Max Muller

Romain Rolland

Herbert Spencer

Hirananda of Karachi

Yogin Ma



Gauri Ma

Golap Ma

Lakshmi Devi Neice of Sri Ramakrishna

Nati Binodini

PEARLS OF WISDOM

The washer man keeps a large store of unwashed clothes in his house, but these are not his. As soon as the clothes are washed, his room becomes empty. Men having no original thoughts of their own are like the washer man. Be not a washer man in your thoughts.

Do Yourself what you wish others to do.

Man becomes small by begging. Even the Lord Himself had to assume the form of a dwarf (Vamana) when he went to Bali for begging. From this example we learn that we demean ourselves, the moment we beg something from anybody.

Men are quick to praise and quick to blame; so pay no heed to what others speak of you.

In living your life of peace and virtue, be indifferent alike to the praise and censure of mankind.

There are certain beings with whom one should be careful. First rich men. They have money, men and great influence. They can injure you if they like. You will have to deal with them very carefully; perhaps you will have to nod to all that they say. Secondly, the dog. When it attacks or barks, you must stop and pacify it by whistling. Thirdly, the bull. When it attempts to gore you, you should calm it by making some sounds. Fourthly, the drunkard. If you excite him, he will abuse you in all sorts of filthy language. But if you accost him endearingly, 'Well, uncle, how are you getting on?'—he will be immensely pleased with you and he will come and smoke with you.

One develops various propensities according to the company one moves in; and again one seeks the company congenial to one's propensities.

There are some who have the nature of a serpent. You never know when they will bite you. You have to struggle hard to counteract their poison. Otherwise you will be so enraged as to feel the passion of revenge (against them).

Anger is a sign of Tamas. In anger man loses all discrimination. Hanuman set fire to Lanka, but he had not sense then to apprehend that it might burn even the place where Sita was staying.

'Gurus can be had by hundreds and thousands, but Chelas (disciples) there is

not one.’ is an ancient saying. It means that many are the persons who can give good advice, but those who follow it are few.

Why do religions degenerate? Rainwater is pure, but by the time it reaches earth it gets dirty owing to the medium it passes through. If the roofs and the pipes and the channels are all dirty, the water discharged through them must also be dirty. (So religion gets defiled by the medium through which it manifests.)

Sin and mercury are hard to digest.

When visiting a sage or going to a temple, you should never go empty-handed. You have to take something, however trifling, in your hand as an offering.

As thieves cannot enter a house if its inmates are wide awake, so if you are always on your guard, no evil thought will enter your mind to rob it of its goodness.

Maya is the attachment towards one’s own relatives such as father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children and cousin. And the love that flows for all creatures equally is called Daya.

As long as I live, so long do I learn.

As long as you live, learn every day of the mysteries of Love and Devotion. It will be always to your advantage.

Bow your head where others are bowing. Veneration never goes unrewarded.

Heaven sometimes speaks through the mouths of lunatics, drunkards and children.

The devil never enters the house wherein songs in praise of Hari are always sung.

The Ganges-water is not to be regarded as water; nor the dust of Sri Brindavana as dust; nor the Mahaprasada of Sri Jagannatha Deva as rice. These three are objective manifestations of the Supreme Being.

If it pleases the Lord, He can even pass an elephant through the eye of needle. He can do whatever He likes.

His steps falter not, who has taken refuge in Him.

Hari means He who steals (Harati) our hearts; and Haribal means Hari is our strength.

Unless the spirit in man gets awakened, he cannot know God.

Take refuge in God and forsake shame and fear. ‘If I were to dance in the name of God, what would people say?’—cast off all such ideas.

To someone the Master said: ‘Well, you have come to seek God now, after spending the greater part of your life in the world. Had you entered the world after realising God, what peace and joy you would have found!’

If you have faith, you will attain to that for which you long.

It is absurd to speak of harm resulting from excessive absorption in God. The rays of a diamond illumine and soothe, but never burn.

Betake yourself to Chid (Pure Consciousness) to realise the Sat (Pure Existence).

The Eternal is to be reached by means of the non-eternal, the Real through the help of the unreal, and the Noumenon through the help of the phenomenon.

His name is Intelligence (Chinmaya) : His abode is Intelligence: and He, the Lord, is All-Intelligence.

THE IMMORTAL JOURNEY

1775 Birth of Kshudiram Chattopadhyay, father of Sri Ramakrishna.

1791 Birth of Chandramani Devi, mother of Sri Ramakrishna.

1793 Birth of Rani Rashmani *(in another school of opinion she was born in 1792).*

1805 Birth of Ramkumar, eldest brother of Sri Ramakrishna.

1815 Kshudiram settles at Kamarpukur.

1817 Birth of Mathura Mohan Biswas.

1824 Kshudiram's pilgrimage to Rameswaram.

1826 Birth of Rameshwar, elder brother of Sri Ramakrishna.

1835 Kshudiram's pilgrimage to Gaya.

1836 Birth of Gadadhar (Sri Ramakrishna), 18 February, about 5-00 a.m. before sunrise.

1841 Attending the village school of the Lahas at the age of five.

1843 First ecstasy (age six or seven) seeing flock of cranes. Death of Kshudiram in autumn.

1844 Second ecstasy; loses consciousness on the way to worship Vishalakshmi.

1845 Sacred thread ceremony (age about nine) First manifestation of guru-bhava: solves scriptural problem for pundits.

1849 Birth of Ramkumar's son, Akshay; death of Ramkumar's wife.

1850 Ramkumar opens school at Jhamapukur area of Calcutta.

1852 Gadadhar moves to Calcutta; stays at the school.

1853 Birth of Sarada Devi, 22 December.

1855 Dakshineswar Kali temple inaugurated by Rani Rashmani.

31 May—Ramkumar was appointed the chief priest, Sri Ramakrishna, the dresser of Mother Kali, and Hriday the assistant of Ramkumar. Sri

Ramakrishna repairs broken image of Krishna. Initiation in Shakti mantra by Kenaram Bhattacharya; appointed priest of Radha-Govinda temple.

1856 Death of Ramkumar. Appointed priest of Kali temple. First god-intoxicated state and first vision of the Divine Mother. Annihilation of 'Pap-purusha' and slapping Rani Rashmani for absent-mindedness.

1857 Treatment under Dr. Gangaprasad Sen for divine madness.

1858 Ramtarak Chattopadhyay (Haladhari), Sri Ramakrishna's paternal cousin appointed priest of the Kali temple; Sri Ramakrishna goes to Kamarpukur for treatment.

1859 Marriage of Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, in May.

1860 Return to Dakshineswar; Mathur's vision of Shiva and Kali in Sri Ramakrishna. Second period of sadhana begins.

1861 Death of Rani Rashmani. Bhairavi Brahmani arrives at Dakshineswar. Tantric practice begins. Second period of divine madness occurs.

1863 Completion of 64 Tantra practices; introduction with Padmalochan.

1864 Practice of vatsalya bhava under Jatadhari; receives Ramlala. Practice of madhur bhava; Chandramani Devi comes to live at Dakshineswar. Arrival of Tota Puri, the Vedantin; initiation into Vedic sannyas by Tota Puri. Attainment of nirvikalpa-samadhi; Tota Puri gives the name 'Ramakrishna'. Vision of 'Ram-Sita' in Sri Ramakrishna by Haladhari and Tota Puri during study of *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

1865 Akshay assumes the charge of priest of the Radhakanta temple after Haladhari. Tota Puri leaves Dakshineswar after admitting the existence of the Divine Mother.

1866 Sri Ramakrishna remains in Advaita plane for six months. Practice of Islam.

1867 To Kamarpukur in spring. First meeting of Sarada and Ramakrishna since wedding. Receives command to remain in bhavamukha. Bhairavi Brahmani takes leave.

1868 Pilgrimage with Mathur Babu and Hriday; meets with Gangamata in Vrindavan.

1869 Grief for the untimely demise of Akshay.

1870 Climbs on the seat of Sri Chaitanya in Colootola Harisabha; tour of Kalna and Nabadwip with Mathur Babu; meets Bhagavan Das Babaji at Kalna.

1871 Meeting with Gauri Pundit. Death of Mathur in July.

1872 The Holy Mother's first visit to Dakshineswar; *Shodashi* Puja to Her by Sri Ramakrishna on the Phalaharini Kali Puja Day

1873 Meets Dayananda Saraswati in January. Death of second elder brother Rameswar.

1874 Practice of Christian path and vision of Christ. Death of the Holy Mother's father Ramchandra; her second visit to Dakshineswar. Shambhu Charan Mallick takes the responsibility of being supplier to the Master. Ramlal arrives at Dakshineswar.

1875 First visit to Keshab Chandra Sen; also meets Captain. Last visit to Kamarpukur.

1876 Death of Chandramani Devi, 13 February. Death of Shambhu Charan Mallick.

1877 Girish Chandra Ghosh meets the Master. Holy Mother's third visit to Dakshineswar.

1879 Beginning of the arrival of the intimate devotees.

1881 Arrival of Rakhal in summer and Narendra in November. Dismissal of Hriday from the temple garden forever.

1882 Arrival of Mahendra Nath Gupta (Sri M) in February. Visits Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

1884 Death of Keshab in January. Death of Narendra's father in February. Holy Mother comes to live at Dakshineswar.

1885 Arrival of Purna Chandra Ghosh, the last earmarked intimate devotee, in March. First signs of throat cancer in April. Leaves Dakshineswar for the last time for Calcutta, 26 September, for treatment. Arrival at 55 Shyampukur Street, 2 October. Treatment by Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar. Worshipped as the Divine Mother on the Kali Puja Day. 11 December moved to Cossipur,

1886 1 January, Becomes Kalpataru. Treatment continues. Distribution of ochre clothes to future sannyasi disciples. Narendra's nirvikalpa samadhi. Organization of disciples. Final instruction to Narendra.

1886 15/16 August, Mahasamadhi at 1-02 a.m.

'What can an insignificant person like myself
say about the One whose glory even sages
like Vyasa and Valmiki could not
adequately measure?' 'What more
shall I say? I bless you all. Be illumined!'